New Poems, New Poets

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THE North American Review

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Melissa & McGonnegal

Dancing into your hearts, America. . . .

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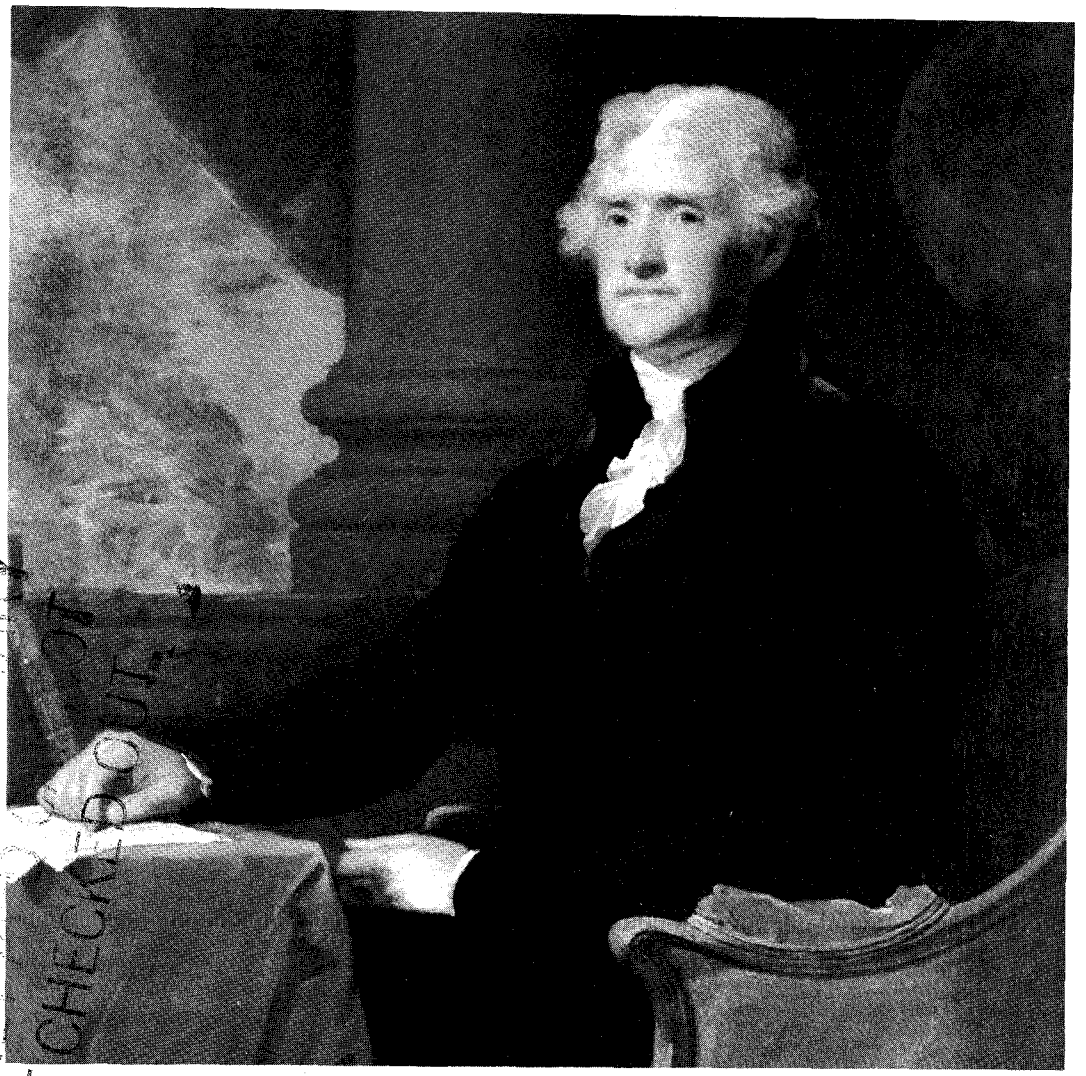

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Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

I am a subscriber to the N. American review and understand you are agent for that work in Richmond. it will be more convenient for me to have it furnished from that place because payment there is easier made. I shall be glad therefore to receive it from you. and this letter presented to Col. Bernard Peyton of Richmond (my correspt) will ensure your receiving payment from him on my account, once a year or oftener if you chuse. I have received No. 46. but not Nos. 44. and 45. which I shall be glad therefore now to receive. accept the assurance of my respect.

Th: J.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Everyone keeps telling us how tough things are in the world of the short story—fewer markets for less reward is the chief yardstick used—and there seem to be two methods of responding to the sad state of fiction affairs. One is to adopt the idiotic posture of a recent New York *Times* reviewer, an eastern professor of English, who flayed the new University of Illinois fiction series because its product was "old-fashioned," who spent a curious amount of space pretending to assess the impact of an academic milieu on writers, who picked a few grammatical nits, and who finally condemned the writers before him for holding other jobs. The other is to *care* about fiction. The former posture gives the world sour egotisms; the latter gives us something worth reading.

This year in the NAR—we are happy to discover—a total of 29 short story writers made 30 appearances. That's a lot of fiction, in the first place, and it's a lot of variety—we are, in fact, quite conscious that we don't want ever to be accused of having a "stable" of writers in this magazine; not that we have any written policy, but that we are restless (some say fickle) and don't wish to make a long-term commitment to any particular Muse. Anyway, long live the short story.

And the poem, we might add. This year: 31 poems, 28 poets. The same wariness for anyone's personal Muse ("We're just good friends!") and the same unwillingness to play favorites in an age where everybody seems to be a pretty good poet. Other statistics: 27 articles by 18 writers (there's our "stable", among our list of contributing editors), 44 books reviewed, something on the order of a quarter-million words printed in this 161st year of the NAR's [checkered] history.

Some odds and ends: Equinox/Avon Books has just published, in paperback, *The American Poetry Anthology*, containing work by 76 poets not yet 41; about a third of that number have appeared in this magazine in recent years. . . .University of Iowa Press has published Barry Targan's *Harry Belten and the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto*; none of the stories were published here, but Targan has done some essays for NAR, so what the heck.

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FOUNDED IN 1815
Vol. 260/No. 4/Winter 1975

The North American Review

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Editor	ROBLEY WILSON, JR.
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Environment	JOSEPH W. MEEKER
Contributing Editors	ROY BEHRENS, RICHARD BROOK, LEO J. HERTZEL, KENNETH LASH, JOHN LINDBERG, STEPHEN MINOT, NORA L. MAGID, WILLIAM K. WOODS
Business Manager	CHARLOTTE L. WILSON

CREDITS: Cover, *William D. Berry*; pp. 59-62, *Lawrence Sturhahn*; 7-14, 39, 45, *Roy Behrens*; 15-23, 30-38, *James Buckels*; 40-44, *Jean Heisterkamp*

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Kenneth Lash

Toward Coming Elections

Despite the Ides of November and what they showed of the thickening muddle in President Ford's head, he continues to press a persistent conviction that the outlines of our democracy are being blurred by the override of governmental presence in areas of decision-making which until recently were private. On this unique point he has not only the rational but the emotional agreement of many people, whatever their class or party. It is a national concern in the process of becoming a felt danger.

Watergate made clear that the United States (a leading-edge nation) is at present an unrealized democracy containing strong layers of totalitarian tactic acting in service of governmental management.

This tactic, spreading rapidly in recent years, surfaces clearly in such areas as increased control and secrecy of information; imbalances of executive power; tightening partnership between state, military, and industry; and at all levels—national, regional, local—an encroaching growth in government of data, by computer, for efficiency. Technologic reasoning and decision-making—presumably objective, coolly managerial. In these same years, however, a counter-movement shoved up from underground: an intensification of the dramatic person and the democratic personality, as one liberation group after another asserted at once both a broadening of its political rights and—more significantly, it becomes apparent—a demand for recognition of its *psychological* rights (*e.g.*, the right to be freed from the prevailing social role of adolescent, negro, female, *et al.*).

The clash of oppositions crystallized in the 1972 U.S. presidential election. These two political and psychological tendencies were both clearly represented, indeed to the point of caricature, in the process of the election. The Democratic primary was dramatic in its achievement of broadening the mechanics and varying the cast of high-level political representation; the election itself was equally dramatic in its immense shout of "NO" to such carryings-on at the presidential level. Final election results: a great roar for good tough governance—and at the same time a sneaking off behind the curtains to elect a yet more liberal Congress and cast of Governors.

It appears undeniable that, whether consciously or not, the electorate was 1) aware of the opposing options, 2) attempting to choose both. One may say this is not choosing at all, but it is. Our formerly monotheistic, right-and-wrong society wanted us to forget that "both" is in fact a choice. Often the only sensible

choice when neither alternative is sufficient in itself. Without charisma to contend with in either candidate—indeed, distrusting them both—the electorate found itself in 1972 asked to choose between two clearly opposed 'ways of life': open, changeable, permissive; closed, ordered, managerial. They voted for both.

But they voted more for the closed, the managed. Probably more than they thought they did, because they wanted to forget certain facts about Nixon the man, and because other facts about Nixon the man had not yet emerged. What seemed clear above all things to the electorate was that their neighbor's affairs needed more managing. "So I can get on with my own business, and no more nonsense." This inability to accept not the moral theory but the *fact* that my neighbor's fate contains a part of my own is The Great Dumbness. And it may in the end determine against democracy. The vote may be for a highly managed state both because an amount of complex management is needed and because such a state is thought to exert a form of coercion that will fall largely on "the other guy."

Let's look again at the electorate in an emergent technocracy. The religion is Science. Like most religions, it is only in part concerned with humane living. This one frees man from much physical hardship, even effort, and binds him up in psychological knots. On the sacred side he is inescapably ignorant of the higher, still changing, mysteries which come to him in such guise as laser beams and space flights, or the numbered chants of that new high priest, The Expert. On the profane side he participates in the down-flowing product of Science—a great universal stream of Knowing How. And therefore, of Doing. An unstable combination, it seems, as knowing how tends to confuse knowing what. Where "doing"—making, producing, solving—is the first order, we do what we learn how to do, all of it seemingly, regardless of whether it fits, suits, sustains . . . or destroys. I know how to bug a room; I do it. In following the how we end at some point being dragged behind it. Surprised, chagrined, demeaned. The electorate of the United States knows this. But what are they to do?

They are convinced, perhaps accurately, that beyond local levels only the Expert, the Insider, knows enough to have any chance of managing the shifting complexities of national survival. Which simply restates the ancient problem of secret and sacred knowledge. How do you exercise control, and what kind, over the men who know things you do not, important things, things that determine? You don't. Ultimately, short of killing them, you can't. In a democratic context you may vote for an amount of

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friction, of neutralizing counter-force (Republican President, Democrat Congress), voting for people who you think will control those other people for you, taking the risk that the result will not be a paralyzing of governmental process. Or you may vote for the Expert himself, as your purest chance. Or you may do both, or neither, feeling deep down that your vote is an illusion because you are blind and powerless. A deep and ancient feeling, this one, since throughout history mass man has indeed been blind and powerless. It seems almost to have been, and to be yet, a condition of existence. We are given faith as a substitute for seeing. Good old blind faith.

Now, in the United States, the faith is boiling off. There is no longer any substitute for seeing—except perhaps technologic Management, itself a natural by-product of faith, but a synthesized force without it. Real enough, however, in its capacity to produce effects. And possibly the only current alternative to seeing, understanding, and individual responsibility expressed in action.

Thus the choice of the electorate becomes either government-by-"Them" —managers and machines—or the personal development of an acute and far-ranging awareness and sense of responsibility. Without the development of such mass awareness the new managers will destroy mass man once again, because they must, because blindness is too destructive and random if left free to roam. (Barbarism has already surged in the U.S.) This time, of course, our destruction may be more "advanced"—both democratic and scientifically compassionate: we may be given all the drugged and painfree comfort a body can ask. Unlike the endlessly harried serf, we may be left most extremely at peace, most exquisitely alone. The serf was necessary; the majority of us in a technocracy are not.

From the manager's point of view the question before history is now this: a) Can mass man be brought to the levels of awareness and responsibility necessary to the effective functioning of a technologic democracy? b) if so, can he be brought to these levels *in time,* in the foreshortened period available to such democracy to survive at any level below that of totalitarian efficiency? (It is not viable in a technologic world to shift coyly from one foot to another, smile beneficently, and pronounce, "Democracy is an inefficient form of government, you know"—as if the new historic necessities were to be swayed by boyish charm. We kept hoping, though, *e.g.,* McGovern, McCarthy, the velvet-gloved Kennedys.)

The problem of the ruled is that of awesome confusion. Cut off from much of the determining information either by our own incapacities or by the calculation of leaders, we are left for our instruction to the media. The media for the mass—which sometimes reveal, sometimes mislead, always sell images of information. Images of great artifice, powerful and short-lived. A highly alert sophistication is required to reduce dramatized image back to fact, and then hold in mind under ceaseless new/news bombardment the relative weight and balance of information. Not many of us can do it yet, so the flash of image comes to prevail as accuracy . . . *if* it accords with our particular notions of our lives. Thus in a brief moment facts may become ideas, and not the kind of ideas that sit around and question: they turn instantly into beliefs and start a drag race. The new situation comedy. The war in the Archie Bunker family is between two hollow generations, nose-led by ideas that aren't their own. They understand each other.

Lacking reliable information we end by feeling ourselves either insufficiently or meaninglessly enfranchised on the national level. Turning toward the corporate family, the town, the neighborhood, we find an even more profound form of disenfranchisement—a disintegrated moral and social commonality. Characterized by an overwhelming paradox wherein nobody seems to need anybody, yet we all feel we need help. Material security, it turns out, has too much fence to it. Tricky fence, that begins by keeping others out and ends by keeping us in. With "success" we freed ourselves from dependence on our community, only to discover with an almost invisible gradualness that the communal is the major source of individual security. Thus, at the precise moment in our history when individual accountability is dissolving, we begin a clamor for institutional accountability. *Somebody* must render us an account, restore an image of logic, a comforting sense of linear progress. For most of us an adequate feeling of security no longer exists as a cornerstone, is not there to help sustain our lives. Predictable result: we blame others for taking it from us. Paranoia becomes a national disease, democratically shared both by the criminal and the victim.

Despite apparently dangerous side-effects, the commonly suggested remedy has been our biochemical synthesis of security: Law and Order. They were required to protect that world in which the only non-betrayer was affluence, the only comfort was personal consuming.

But that world is dissolving. Our affluence is being inflated away from us (taken back by the government) at home, successfully competed for abroad. And now industrial machines, meant to produce for our consuming, reverse into shocking competition and themselves become consumers. Where has the meaning of it all gone to?

Again the deeper question lies in multiplicity: not the problem of poverty of meaning—though many liberals led us to think so—but the problem of affluence of meaning. There is too much of it. Suddenly it's everywhere. Everything has dynamic and potentially explosive meaning—every act, every work, everything in our personal history, our society's history, our history's history. You have to be a scholar-poet to understand it, a "shrink" to boil it down for digestion, a master of Kung Fu to go on coping with it. Legitimate claims on our attention and concern are everywhere. A central energizing meaning for it all is nowhere. Yet, it *has* to be somewhere, doesn't it? It can't just have vanished. It's back in the past maybe, or just up ahead. So the kids try mystic imports from the East, while the leaders scurry back and forth from the ecumenical Vatican of IBM.

All of this inside a boiling of change, and nobody able to turn down the heat. Problems that are not calculable feel, of course, like crises. Maybe they are. But a human crisis has two parts: the situation, and the people involved. Standing back, standing away for a minute when we can, there is still the persistent vision of a mass electorate—the United States man and woman—*almost* equal to the tasks of self-government, making historic strides toward awareness, right through and even by agency of Watergate yesterday and Watergates yet to come. Los Angeles elected a black mayor—surely the most spectacular picture of motion they've ever turned out.

So the tendencies converge, here in towns, there in countries. In many places it triggers only the old response, wherein the mass gathers itself into a ball and rolls into the hands of rulers. In others, either the pace or efficacy of management suddenly falters. Goods, money, efficiency—get on the wrong side of them for a few years and forty years of democracy are liquidated in Uruguay. You've got to initiate and absorb the new international techniques of

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management, and set them into action right now or you sink. Many of the new, emergent countries understand this, and so each year there are fewer democracies.

Do *we* understand it? Not clearly, as all the conflicting signs show. But enough to keep producing new conflicting signs, new realizations of an urgency to settle conflicting claims: social programs vs. solvency vs. trade unions vs. inflation vs. hidden price setting vs. freedom vs. law and order vs. criminalization of all strata of our society. . . . Democracy and the diminishing individual vs. technologic management and the increasing state.

Almost everybody in the United States is aware of the existence of these problems. Almost all of us are living inside one or more of these problems. Almost all of us are asking, How can I get out of this? The choice of answer to that question will determine the election results to come. And, very soon, the changing shape of our government.

If a sufficient number say *I* can get out of this, or *We* can get out of this, then the likelihood is a diverse, pluralistic set of election returns and an ongoing democracy, however modified. If a sufficient number say *They* can get us out of this, only *They* can understand it and command the power, then a strong, uniform set of candidates is likely to be chosen and a strong, uniform approach to governing is likely to develop. Regardless of party, regardless of person. The parties offer differing solutions; they do *not* offer differing approaches. Though emphasizing different areas, both claim the necessity for broader social controls. Democracy with less-democratic institutions.

At this moment when so many people feel powerless in the electoral process, cheated by it and unbelieving in it, elections ironically become each year more momentous. I don't know in what proportions we shape or are shaped by history, individual or collective, but I have a deep feeling that history wants to turn a corner. Soon now, we'll know which corner it is. □

LUCY SWOPE

ORION

The moon's sliver is divided
by spring boughs. a man leans
heavily against the red-maple
he says "is there something so terribly wrong
with me that you can't love?"

She thinks "it's my favorite moon
delicate, unpocked"
Orion strides above them. she thinks
"I can't see his eyes, but his shoulders
are clear. he watched me
kissing under the darkest sky on the moors.
I could see his belt. he watched as another
felt my body surrounded by man-high bracken and followed
with Sirius across seas
to an island where dogs chased, howling
at night driving me
to a stranger's arms."

"Good-night" she says,
leaving.

A man leans heavily
against a red-maple. his arms reach
through the branches, his fingers
spread, the tips
about to open.

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NEW POEMS, NEW POETS

Dave Smith • T. Alan Broughton • Robert Dana
Colette Inez • Wayne Zade • Mary Hussmann
Paula Rankin • Mark Halperin • Stephen Jamison

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DAVE SMITH

WHEN THE FIDDLERS GATHER

Now they are become more than men we must know how
to tune up, to take
their flying root-and-stem light of joy
from each old hand as it pumps under the dunesigh
and liver-spotted leaf, learn
from lean gray men
hunched on a rail and singing to the waters the beauty
of breezeless gull-dotted dusk.

This one, his time come, nods, clamped jawbones
patient as a crab's,
years of notes loosed now, ear tufts and
silver hair drifting like streamweed, sways, pours
down his last gamboling sweat
for the world to out-
sing itself. Then another from the bed of his leg
lifts fiddle, begins to cuddle

and counterstroke the dying-out strain that a gone
grandfather sang to
the end like a man fearing God (so cries
the tune-whipped and untucked brother of their
right hand). When he buckles,
the next bows quickly
in feeling his boots already tapping the dark line
of the hewn fence. It must be

like entering a world where every breath turns dead
reckless and pure as gull
song tuned by nothing but ribbed sealight,
where hard-headed laid-down fathers rise up slowly
among crocus and bluebell as if
only minutes before
sleep whined like a gnat. And it could be standing
simply in the lightning-

like motions of such nameless, hardly to be believed
angels, we come at last
into the unfretting wish to be nothing else,
for there rises from bow's graze and struck strings
not only land's lute, but eerie rapture
stunning the sailor
who feels at first daybreak a peace slicing wrist-labor
as if before storm or prayer.

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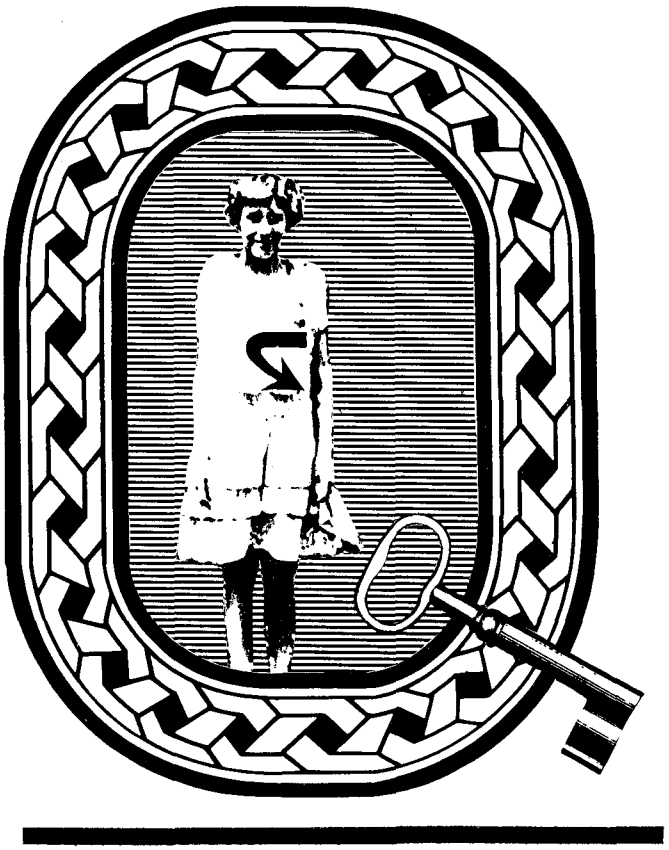

T. ALAN BROUGHTON

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

In an oval place of green grass
the people come to sit. They yell
and hold up flags.
Two groups of men are kicking
a ball toward large nets
one at each end where only one man
stands dressed in black.
He dives at the ball and embraces it.

Outside there are many
who could not fit in.
They buy food and wander about
or rush to holes in fences and walls
when the crowd inside
shakes the air with their screaming.
Rockets whine and explode
and policemen keep children from climbing in.
Some people here look furtive.

On a hillside above the oval
others are gathered where the absence of trees
permits them to look down.
From here the stands are filled
with colored dots that move
white or blue specks chasing the ball.
The yelling sounds like
one animal whose mouth is a megaphone.

On the summit is a cross bearing
a man with nails through his hands and feet.
Spikes issue from his head.
Iron stakes in the base
prevent the people from climbing
for a view below.

A path wears down to the next hill
but no one watches from there.
One man is walking it
again and again.
He has thick glasses on his worried face
and reads a book full of naked women.
Sometimes lovers have used these woods
for leaving litter.
He hardly seems to know where he is.

From the top of this hill
the oval cannot be seen
only the city spread in profusion
around the olive serpent of river
or wedges of green park brocading
the rise and fall of slopes
and the other hill where cross and man are one.

You cannot see the people
but you hear them.
What they say together
goes straight up into the sky.

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ROBERT DANA

PASSOVER

Monday is the moon
A supper of ovum and blood yolk
madness in a dark mouth

Tuesday is two days
A cloud of spiders drifts over Corpus Christi toward the Gulf
where if touch is truth
your skin is a listener

Dressed in Wednesday black
a white-faced ex wife
keeps his voice low for his daughters his lost son
Her hands are the kitchens of suicide
They will not cease

Thursday is itself all day
The morning paper campaigns in the hall
What will the next president preside over of purpose
In news resembling this
it snows
It will not be spring

And if he once concedes
how nothing of necessity passes into the face of its kind
Friday will be Passover
will be wine
a meal of horseradish and bone
they will be lucky they need not eat

To Saturday
he returns the long book that reads
'To see is to be lonely'
'Beauty is the beginning of a terror we're just able to endure'

And Sunday he stands
at all eleven doors of the five rooms of his life
The windows bubble with wet light
The floors have been washed
old furnishings brushed and polished

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COLETTE INEZ

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1.

To what extent did you love?
To a large extent in a line
Of plovers going south.

How do you justify kisses
coming like plovers from Baffin Bay,
back and forth
between narration and tears?

The omissions that seem most important
aren't here to judge.
Love hovered in the courtroom,
a hummingbird drawn to a perfumed vial.

2.

In what sense of the word did you sing?
Shboom. The setting was significant.
Twenty years of birds
flying south to Uruguay.

How do you isolate the gold dust factor
from problems of flight in a given range?
His flight, my range, home on the sofa
with an antelope's ounce of intention to stay
as opposed to buffalos, as opposed to clouds.

On what grounds did you sight the terns?
In the pearl-grey mantle of the fog.
In our ornithology, he was my finch,
I, his crow. He was my cardinal, I, his nun
flying towards a perfect vow. Christ, I do.

We will meet from time to time
in a garden of Dominicans.
Adios, Brother Gold.
Our vanishing act won't wash
the glittering questions away.

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WAYNE ZADE

SUMMER, THE LONELINESS

The small deposits of rain on the stairs
are like the names implied in bulletins in code

on police radios, which anyone can own.
Children who put shells to their ears can hear

an ocean in the street from miles away,
their own noise, and barking, coming back,

and inside that, a tangible emission of air
from a sleeper's lips, like a spray of mint

on the skin. I'm talking about summer, the loneliness
of pets on cool porcelain, the appearance of a man

in boots early in the morning outside a house,
how the swimming pool filling is like his marriage,

in the tiny collisions in the pipes he hears nothing.

MARY HUSSMAN

THE DOG

how can I tell them? down those stairs
in their part of night, alone because
they want to be and me alone, above
them in my part of night and I don't
want to go but the staying is worse.
so I'm into the room and their faces
lift from books to look at me but I
don't talk and don't cry because how
can I tell them about the dog by the
tracks and someone said it's dead.
it was so burned black like wood but
I touched it with my foot and it didn't
crumble and it didn't even move it was
so dead and then we ran and I ran too.
its smell was in my nose and I had to
run to get away and had to cry it was
so dead. so dead. and how can I tell
them I can still smell it and still see
it all burned black when I shut my eyes?
and they stare at me and poke at me
with their eyes and what's wrong. are
you sick? but I can feel the dog in my
mouth all dry and hot and it won't let
me tell them. then hands touch my head
and my face. and I say yes, yes and go
to them because I want to feel safe
in their cool, cool arms.

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PAULA RANKIN

SACRIFICES

Staring into the mammoth's fossilized jaw,
I think of all the holes
where we never touch bottom,
cannonballs through civil war soldiers,
gaps left by abominable snowmen
crossing over.

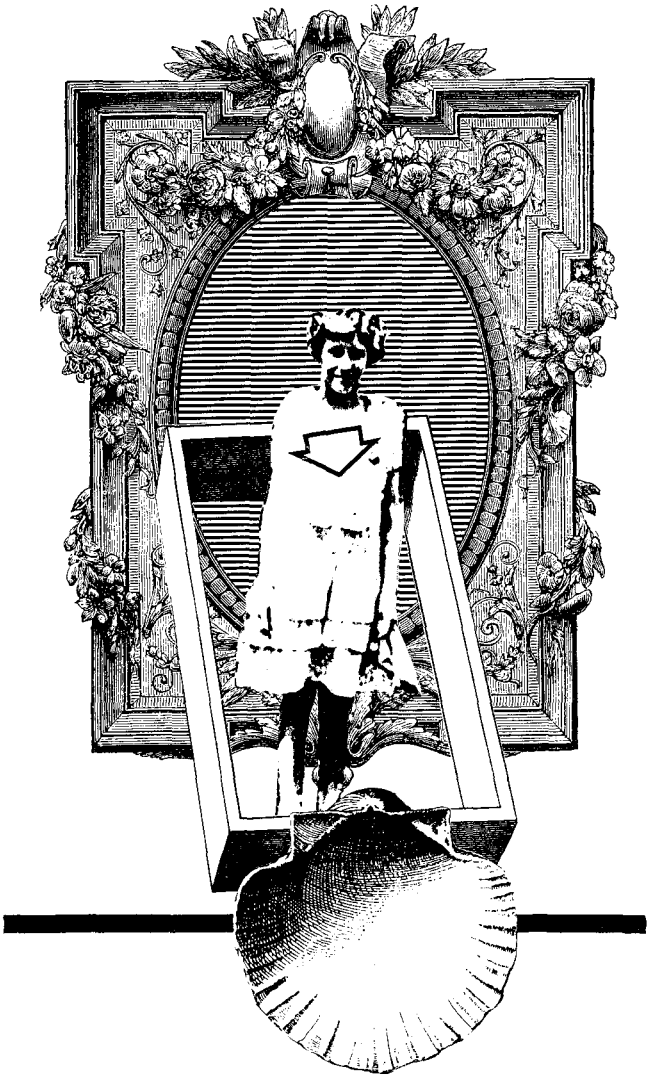
When I touch the spearhead lodged
in his backbone, I remember Indians
gored through their pectoral muscles
with the same weapon, sacrificed to all the gods
who counted: sun, wind, river, rain.
Now here we all come as tourists, pretending
to watch from such distance, planting ourselves
like crops that need no intervention.

Last night I watched a dog
bleed for hours after death,
the god of ignitions satisfied, spinning rubber
towards other intersections

and I found myself asking
whether willingness counts, if the cells
must announce their intention
before they meet tire, razor, bullet,
or a bridge's cement pilings,

if the body must make its leap
with all the pores open

or if getting pushed counts
or even being nudged, lash-blink
by lash-blink, towards the edge
something's always slipping off of.



MARK HALPERIN

RESOLVE

The day comes when the bird feeder
stands empty and the fatted junco settles
into feathers on the branch, when no dog, either
young or old, will bark, and kettles
hold their breath. The morning arrives
when there's no light, when the blankets are lead
and vampires, call them work or the mundane in our lives,
guard the ways out, when I've considered
the clock on my shelf or in my gut, flinched
one more time, then marked Finished
to the claims of infant and parent. Let the sky
close, I think, were I my own, were I . . .
So, like the poor, I atone for the sins
I couldn't commit, and my resolve, of itself, softens.

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STEPHEN JAMISON

THE BREAD EATEN IN THE DARK

The sun gone,
I slept
before dinner,
and rose
at last
to the meal finished,
the room dark.

With nothing to do,
I dust the yellow bulb
as I did when a bellboy
in the hotel lobby
of Big Sur Lodge,
small white tissue
papers in my pocket,
wearing my red bell jacket
with name in gold,
sewn by Dolly
the housekeeper,
and now in the dark
another life rises
at the new shade.

Only Aaron slept
in this room
when I was brought
to Ward B.
Aaron brought for fainting
and visions as I was,
sat when I wakened
talking to Jesus and
rubbing oil into his lame legs
and the yellow light in his palms.

Now he gives the dust
in my pocket another name,
thin and dry like bread.
We rise to it
when the others eat,
we alone waken
to it above the pillow
when the room is dark,
bread saved from the pantry
held out in his palm
and eaten in the dark.

Now in the dark I see
the bones of his legs shining,
rubbed in oil
the nurses give him,

and this bread I eat
is damp in my hands.
Aaron is at the window now,
the little light smooth
in his shaven scalp,
and he is talking to Jesus.

I will go now
to stoop a last time
to the fist of each yellow light,
glass flower, shallow hollow bulb
by the shadow of his hand,
with a leaf of no meal when we waken,

this dark bread
we take by lights out
in the room.

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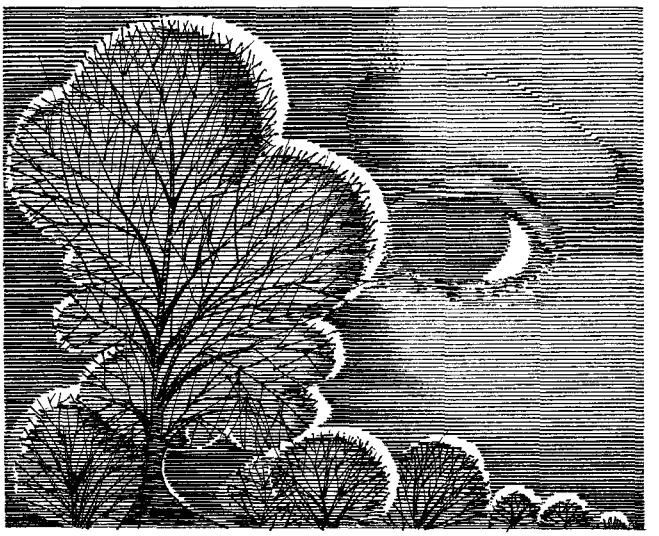
GHOST IMAGES

by Stephen Minot



Meeting them at the ferry was no simple matter. Kraft knew it wouldn't be. He had predicted it out loud while driving his Jeep to Yarmouth. "Something will go wrong," he said. "I'll have spent an entire morning getting there and something will go wrong."

A voice from the vacant seat beside him said *Never you mind*, but he shook his head. "No, it's more than just wasting the morning. More than that. I was getting along all right. Another month would have done it. A little behind schedule, maybe. But on the right track. Then the family. And now guests. There's no need for all this. No need. Guests! Uninvited. At least not invited by *me*. Not one but two. Two more people in that ark. That's Tammy's way. Invite them in pairs, and mismatched at that. Mixes guests like a kid with his first paints. Fearless and messy."

Well, of the two of them, Harry wouldn't be much trouble. Harry was his publisher. He had traveled. Nothing ever really fazed him. The worst part of his visit was the dishonesty. Posing as a friend, Harry was coming as a one-man, tax deductible fact-finding committee. He and Tammy were in on it together.

He would stay three days, talking about everything *but The Liberal Tradition Between the Wars*, and on the last day he would raise the matter in an offhand way. "Oh by the way, about that manuscript of yours. . . ." Kraft could hear the practiced informality. Once Harry had his worst suspicions confirmed, he would give Kraft hell. Well deserved, too. He was behind schedule. Kraft had no defense. "O.K., I've been a wayward son. I have it coming."

Which was crazy. Why should he give in like that, turning himself into an abject serf? Normally Kraft resisted criticism of all sorts and from all quarters, blasting his academic and political enemies before they had time to attack. It was the only way to survive in a world of reactionary élitists. But Harry deserved special treatment. It wasn't his age—he was only slightly older—and it wasn't his position of power. That never quelled Kraft Means. Still, he forgave Harry outrages he never would have tolerated in others.

The day was inexcusably warm for Nova Scotia. When Kraft arrived in town the ferry was docking, passengers crowding along the rail, some waving. The bay was without a ripple.

He found a parking space with difficulty, muttering darkly to his invisible companion about all these damned tourists. "Wait here," he said, hurrying to reach the pier just as the passengers were streaming off.

Harry was easy to spot. There he was, a full head taller than the others, dressed in his white suit and white Panama hat, a Degas gentleman in the park on a Sunday afternoon. An anachronism. A flagrant, almost militant anachronism. Kraft felt a great wave of affection.

"Harry!" Kraft took his suitcase—a deference he gave to no one else, including his wife. "Sorry, but we have to pick up someone else."

"Someone else? Another guest?"

"Crazy Min."

"You're running a rest home?"

"Might as well."

"You didn't warn me."

"Warn you! Harry, I didn't even *invite* you. You've got to take your chances."

"How crazy, this Crazy Min?"

"You've never met her. Believe me, she's absolutely psycho."

They were interrupted by the jostle of the crowd streaming off the ferry—tourists from the States dressed for some Caribbean cruise, returning Canadians. Shouts of greetings. Embracing. After two months of solitude, Kraft found all

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STEPHEN MINOT is a contributing editor to the NAR. His book of short stories, Crossings, *was recently published by Illinois. "Ghost Images" is excerpted from a novel of the same name, in progress.*

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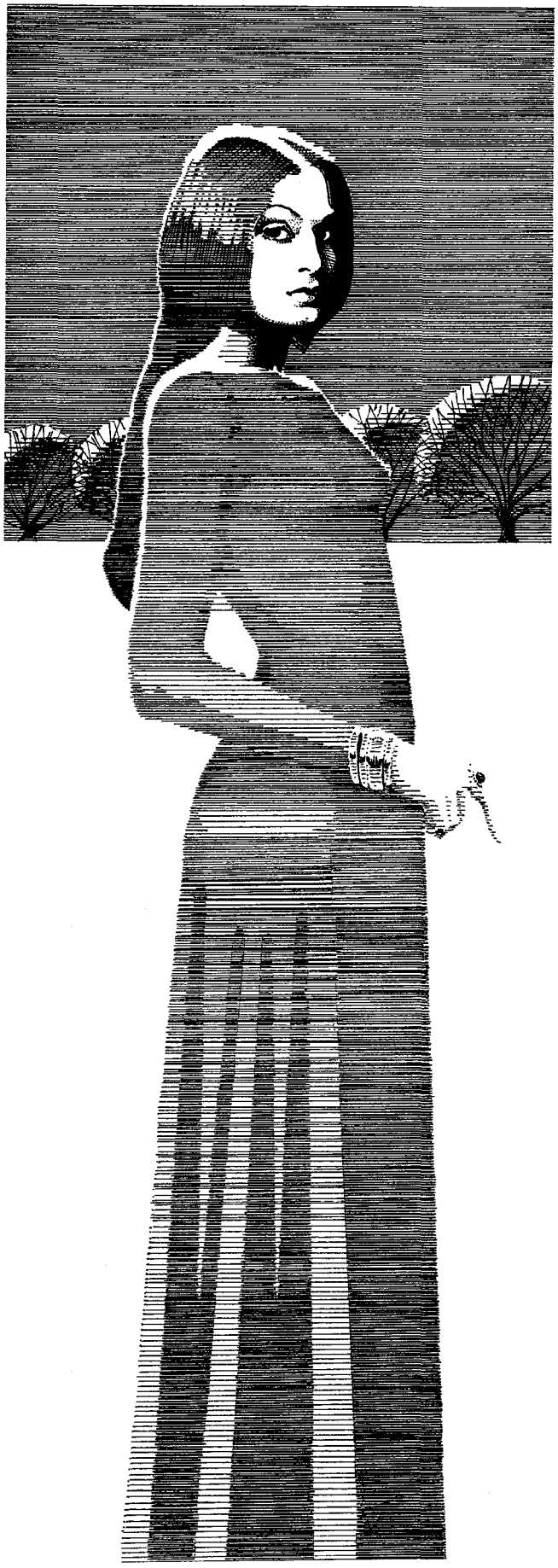

this unnerving. He preferred the lean, quiet hostelers with their ten-speed machines. The Province, he decided, should restrict tourist travel to bicycle and horse.

Next came the parade of cars, trucks, buses, campers, trailers. Kraft and Harry were pressed against the fence to make room. "The bastards are taking over the Province," Kraft said.

"There ought to be a law."

"There is, and they're trying to turn it against us. But never mind that. Keep your eye out for this wretched girl. I hope they had the sense to tie a tag on her shirt front."

"A *child*? I should be looking for a *child*?"

"Yes. Aged 30. Widowed. Addled brain."

"A relative?"

"Not a Means, thank God, but too damn close. She's Tammy's sister."

The crowd dwindled and the last of the cars came off the ramp. There was no sign of Min. "It would be like her to change her mind at the last moment," Kraft said. "Wrong stars will put her off. Ugly tea leaves. The flight of pigeons."

"You can't be serious."

"I am and she is."

"Maybe *I* should have put it off."

"Hell, no. Min's the one who should be put off. Except you can't. She never gives much warning. I received notification yesterday. A kind of annunciation from Tammy—'Oh, by the way, Min is coming on tomorrow's ferry. Always room for one more.' "

Harry, he wanted to add, Harry, I'm not ready for all this. I'm not up to it.

"Tammy never mentioned having a sister."

"They have nothing whatever in common."

"Well, she's not here. You sure this isn't some delusion of yours?"

Kraft gave him a quick look. What had Tammy been saying about him?

"Well if she does show up, you can judge for yourself. Don't expect the slightest echo of Tammy. They spent their childhoods figuring out ways to be different from each other."

"Min? Is that a real name? Like the mouse?"

"The mouse was Minnie. No relation. This is really Minerva."

"I've never known a Minerva."

"My wife's parents' fault. Intellectuals. It warped her for life. Her whole name is Minerva T'sali. That's T-apostrophe-s-a-l-i. Married T'sali for his name. Figured that if there was anything weirder than 'Minerva' it would be 'Minerva T'sali.' "

"Tibetan?"

"Close. Indian. *Indian* Indian, that is. The fag-end of an old merchant family in Jamaica. He came to New York to find God and settled for Minerva."

Harry allowed himself a fleeting smile—the first since he had arrived. It was a game they played, the straight-face game. Forcing a smile from the other was like taking the knight. Somehow that bridged their political differences.

"We'll have to search the ferry," Harry said, as if this were a routine a summer host should accept without complaint. Kraft felt a jab of disappointment. He had been ready to leave, to assume that Min was lost. Still, Harry was

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right. If she had actually been on the passenger list, there would be a hell of a row.

"Find someone with an officer's cap," Harry said, but Kraft hardly heard, imagining some final note tied to her Tarot deck—"The sea has called me to her forgiving arms." Reporters. An inquest. A great clutter of awkward questions. Did he really search the ship? Did he perhaps *wish* to have her lost? Didn't this raise the question of criminal responsibility? Snide innuendos in the columns of *Time*: "The rose-hued Mr. Means tersely denied all responsibility, though his eyes were significantly dry at the funeral. No mourner he!" The bastards. Just short of libel as always.

But Harry had found an officer and was employing his editor's voice, the resonances of which recalled for Kraft the voice-of-doom announcers in the newsreels from a former age.

"One of your passengers has not left the ship." Subtly, the responsibility bounced back to the officer. "She may be in serious trouble. A somewhat unstable woman. We'll help you search."

Searching the ship was no simple task. More than a ferry, it was a small liner complete with casinos and staterooms.

"The bar, perhaps," the officer said coolly.

"Not the type," Kraft said. "Not at all. More likely she's gone over the edge." Both men looked at him. "People do that," he said. "All the time."

They boarded the ship and circled the first deck, silently, rapidly. The next deck had the lifeboats and Kraft could visualize her inert body curled up in one. But he didn't suggest that they search them. Some sailor would make the discovery in a year or so, a skeleton in fetal repose, finger bones still grasping her I Ching coins, waiting for the final throw.

It was on the top deck that he spotted her. Alive. Disappointment grappled with relief. Then rage swept through him. She was in a secluded corner, hidden among the air vents, lying in a deck chair like a long-limbed ghost of Cleopatra touring the Nile. Smooth, black hair parted in the middle curved down both sides of her face ending with two points, chin-level; hoop earrings in the form of self-consuming snakes; enormous and soulful eyes. She was not to be believed.

"Look at that," she said in her husky voice which Kraft once thought was sexy.

"Min, for God's sake. . . ."

"Ma'am, the ship has docked. . . ."

But she wasn't paying any attention. "Just look at that," she said. "Stare at it a moment."

They looked up as instructed, following the line of her raised hand and lengthy finger.

"That," Harry said with cool patience, "is radar."

"Only on the most superficial level," she said to him. "I've been staring at it since sunrise this morning. It has transported me to places you will never see." Then she stood up and abandoned her Delphic Oracle voice, turning matter of fact. "Kraft, you look like death. You can't have slept for a week. You must be badly out of balance."

"Min," he said in a tone of exaggerated calm and reasonableness which he used only when enraged almost beyond reason, "no woman who stares at revolving radarscopes for the length of a morning and has to be sought like a wayward child can claim to be an expert on balance." Then, while he still had her attention, he introduced Harry.

The two-hour drive from the town of Yarmouth eastward along the south shore to his place was made in almost complete silence. If Kraft had been alone with Harry, the two of them would have sat beside each other and chatted amiably about the approaching end of civilization and other topics of passing interest and would have had a good time of it. Their political differences were so deep, so well charted, so clearly labeled ("Warning: hopeless gulf ahead"), that they were easily skirted.

And if Min had been the only passenger, there would have been a conversation of sorts. Over the years they had developed a kind of private language, each of them treating the other as a benign defective. There were times when they almost enjoyed each other on that basis. Crazy, yes; but she did have a kind of languid sexual energy.

By having the two of them together, Kraft became the child of two estranged and hostile parents. It was a sad contrast with the trip down to meet them that morning when, alone, he had felt free to talk almost continually.

With effort he managed to drive them out of his mind. He had no need for either of them. After all, he was doing just fine before any of them came up to break into his life.

They were driving by miles of stunted firs and hemlocks, miserable trees too short for lumbering. Bad soil and heavy winds kept them from developing. Kraft could imagine Harry's unspoken reaction to this desolation, this emptiness.

Well *I* like it, he said silently in defense.

Why?

It's desolate. Unsocial.

Why won't those trees grow?

Poor soil, I guess. The real farm land is on the other side, on the Bay of Fundy. Here it's the rugged look.

As in rugged individualist?

Rugged as in unspoiled. No one selling moccasins. Sand dunes, too. Miles of dunes and deserted beaches. Not all bought up by motels.

Bought up by people like you.

It came as a package.

Some package. A thousand acres?

Just short of a thousand. Besides, if I hadn't acted when I did, the goddamned huckster developers would have raped the area.

Maybe they think of *you* as the developer.

I'm developing nothing.

Or a speculator.

I'll never subdivide.

Then you're a reactionary landholder. An American land baron. Isn't that what you said your father was?

Listen, the day United Fruit and Exxon turn over their holdings to the people, I'll give my acreage to the Province.

"Hey, turn here!" It was Min breaking in. What was worse, she was right. They were at Eldridge's store already—a little gray-shingled building, also the man's home—which seemed to serve nothing but wilderness. They had been on the road almost two hours and Kraft would have driven right by it if she hadn't spoken. He wrenched the wheel as if it were Min's throat.

"He's in terrible shape," she said, turning to Harry, who

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was sitting in the back seat, leaning forward, his arms resting on the back of the front seat. He agreed with her all too readily.

"Sleepy at the wheel," Harry said.

"Dreamy and forgetful," she said, her voice vibrating on the dirt road. "Would have gone right by it."

"It's not always a good idea to go off like this. Off alone, I mean. Everyone wants to get off alone. You dream about it in the city. But it's not always such a good idea."

Suddenly the two of them had something to discuss—Kraft. And they babbled on as if they were alone in the car.

"It's one thing if you're in balance. I lived in a lighthouse one summer. Beautiful. Just me and those gulls and the wind. But I was in balance. Kraft isn't in balance. You can tell by looking at him. I could tell the moment I set eyes on him. He's in very serious shape. You can't live off here if you're not in balance. All this land but no inner balance."

"This is his? All this?"

"All this. From the store down to the sea. A thousand acres."

"It is *not* a thousand acres," Kraft said savagely.

"Almost a thousand acres. Who's to count? In any case, that's some estate for someone who wants to share the wealth."

"It's not *estate*," Kraft said. "Estates have lawns. No lawns here. Just acreage. Wait until you see the house, Harry." He was reminded of how terrible it would all look through Harry's eyes. He smiled in anticipation. "Call it a farm. I prefer the word 'farm.' "

"You've taken up pigs and cattle?" Harry asked.

"Well, you could say my product is social research."

"That," Min said, "is a stifling concern. Here you are with trees and sand and the sea—your anima speaking to you—and you spend your time pecking at a typewriter, fiddling with all those sterile concepts. It's no wonder you look like a corpse."

"Harry, do I look like a corpse?"

"Of course not. No mortician would display you as you are."

Betrayal! "Is this how you encourage your little stable of writers?"

"From what I've heard, you haven't been doing much writing."

Min nodded fiercely. "Tammy says you're in bad shape. It's clear from one look at you. What *have* you been doing with all this free time and solitude?"

The full horror of the coming weekend broke on him like a cold wave. Instead of having to deal with two hopelessly dissimilar guests, he was about to face a conspiracy. He slammed on the brakes. The jeep skidded to a stop in the middle of absolute wasteland—scrubland, stunted trees gray with dust from the road.

"Look," he said. "Hands off my psyche. Either that or you both walk back to Yarmouth from here. Got it?"

His passengers nodded, solemn. "Hey," Harry said, "sorry. Easy does it." Kraft started up again with a jerk. By the time he reached fourth gear, he was feeling better. In control. He even started humming "You Are My Sunshine."

"That just proves it," Min said, speaking to no one, face forward, staring into the desolate road. "A dangerous disharmony. Radically out of balance."

The evening scene was a wonder, a mirage. After two and a half months of solitude, of sordid, utilitarian life, it was difficult to believe the place could become so elegant. He held his glass against his brow and beheld the picture before him through the amber hues of light Jamica rum. Harry at the head of the table in his white pants, white shirt, blue-and-gold ascot. At the other end of the table—the rum sloshing pleasantly against the bridge of his nose as he panned left—Min in a black, full-length skirt, black blouse, and a great clutter of beads, golden bracelets, rings, all a-glitter. A gypsy queen! And Tammy—his wife in some other world?—in evening pants and striped shirt, all blue-and-white cool, her hair more tightly curled than ever, thanks to her swim, a no-nonsense, short, blond Afro. Hard to imagine her a lawyer. Right now, loosened up, a fluid image through his rum, she was his student once again, efficient, humming with energy, just barely within reach.

The children were also strangers—the two boys Elizabethan in their lengthy hair, and Hildy, the youngest at eleven, a Victorian portrait in one of her many long dresses. Such femininity! How had she ever sprung from that mother?

The whole scene was slightly faded, a color photo turning to sepia, the amber of the rum aged by the yellow glow from the Aladdin lamp hanging above and candles on the table.

"When you're through cooling your brow with that drink," Tammy said, "you might try eating. You could do with some food."

He turned his optical device downward and noticed a cascade of rum fall decorously down to a heaping plate of paella, spray rebounding from the clam shells and sinking into the hunks of lobster, fish, and sausage.

"Kraft!" from Min, but she turned back to the others, rippling on about bio-feedback. Guiltily he put his glass down and attacked the food. There had been times in his solitude when he had taken perhaps one or two more drinks than he really needed for survival; he wasn't going to do anything here that would be an echo of that. He listened to the conversation the way one watches waves, smiling, nodding.

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Harry and Min, it turned out, were compatriots not only of the same city but of the same six-block neighborhood of the old Village. They had spent a great deal of their time eating in the same foreign restaurants and evaluating them. How had they not met until now? Strange forces were at work.

They each put up nominations for the best Assyrian menu, settled on a winner, and then ranked three runners-up. Then on to Japanese. More wondrous still, both of them were off-and-on vegetarians. This gave them a still stranger set of places to discuss, some "dazzling" and others "abysmal." They even shared adjectives.

This man calling himself Harry was a stranger. How was it that he was seated at the head of the table, *Kraft's* table, and had full control of the conversation? Kraft was entertained—the single viewer of a cinema scene; but it would have been good to have been taken in, to be included in the image. His pleasure was mixed with a dull ache in his stomach. It was going to take a while before he was used to having real people around the place.

Still, it was an effective scene. He could take pleasure in that. It was artistically successful. The lighting, the composition, even the dialogue. A certain ambiance. Stylized, yet convincing. One had the impression that they were real, that they could be touched.

"You look pleased," Tammy said to him. "For the first time since we've come back."

"That's not true."

"That you're pleased?"

"That I didn't before. I distinctly recall looking pleased when you discovered the water was cold."

"I'll bet you did."

"No, it's the *place* that looks good to me." He gestured around. "All cleaned up. Populated."

"I'm sure you had it populated," Min said.

"What?"

"Geminis are notorious for that—filling empty space with people, spirits."

"What kind of spirits?" little Hildy asked. She knew, of course, what spirits were. Her Aunt Min had introduced her to all that years before. She was only acting as a wily shill.

"Weldon." Tammy's voice cut the conversation off neatly. "Time to check the lamps. You take the responsibility tonight, will you? Every half hour. Remember?"

Her tone was cool, pleasant; but there was no refusing. Clocks ticked in her head and she did her best to give her sons the same jeweled mechanisms.

Weldon started on his rounds and she, the expert, always, explained to Harry how they had to adjust the Aladdin lamps every half hour to keep them from smoking. "The only alternative is using those gasoline ones. They'll burn all night on one pumping, but they glare. And Kraft doesn't like the smell."

"Like a garage."

"So it's Aladdin around here—no real choice. Me, I wouldn't mind putting in an electric line. It means paying for poles in from the highway—a year's royalties, I suppose." A flash of a smile to Kraft. "I'm afraid I don't have his passion for the 19th century."

Kraft drew himself up and plunged through the silver screen into the scene. "Passion? I don't have passions. Just revulsions. I detest electric knives, electric can openers, electric stoves. Can you imagine brushing your teeth with something that hums? It's the great General Electric hoax. Electric doorbells instead of knockers; electric swizzle sticks. Jesus, there was a day when a member of the bourgeoisie could boast about his status with a new suit of clothes; now he has to have an all-electric kitchen and an electric *bed*. All I ask is that we not have a mini-Hilton on the shores of Worwich Bay. Is that so wild? What's the matter, Tammy, has the New Haven Green-Stamp Culture finally got to you?

"Lucky you came up here when you did. Back to sanity. Look around you." He gestured with his wine glass, Chablis wafted in air, children set to giggling. "Genuine. Basic. No curtains, no plaster, no electric back-scratchers. For God's sake, Tammy, don't start asking for electric back-scratchers."

"O.K., O.K." Tammy's face was alight with pleasure. "Right on. Give 'em hell."

It *was* a good speech. Convincing. It convinced *him* as well. There had been times during his solitary confinement when the place got to him. Alone, drifting through those lath-sheathed rooms, talking with himself and others, he sometimes had the feeling that the house was not quite right, was haunted. But here with the lamps glowing extravagantly in every room he was convinced once again that he had every right to defend the place just as it was. Simplicity. Honesty. Frontier values. And a true escape from the petty bourgeois values which threatened him on every side and moved closer now that he was building a reputation as a prophet on the left. Harsh rural simplicity was the only justification for a retreat like this. She was smiling, but she understood it. Not Harry, of course. And not Min. But Tammy—still his student in some ways—Tammy understood it.

"You're unreal," she said tenderly.

"Look!" Min said, gesturing. "Spirits!"

What she saw was Weldon's shape moving about in the living room, his image flickering in horizontal bars through the unplastered laths. The division between the rooms was never absolute, especially at night. Between the slats one caught the glimmer of lamps and the shadow of human forms translated into horizontal bars like radio photographs from the thirties. Kraft enjoyed the effect.

For a moment Weldon appeared in full bodily form as he passed the open doorway to the hall, and then became a radio-photo again, a hundred little horizontal lines in the kitchen.

"Don't forget the hanging one," Tammy said, not having to shout since sound as well as visual images passed through the laths. In years past, everyone knew when one of the children was having a nightmare. As for sex, Kraft and Tammy had to share it with stealth—late at night and muffled. It added to the intensity.

"The same principle," Kraft said, "as Japanese paper walls."

"There's nothing Oriental about it," Harry said. "It's more like a stack of lobster traps."

"That's all right with me," Kraft said. "That makes me king of the lobsters."

"In a trap?"

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"Coffee time," Tammy said. And there was a general bustle, cooperative clearing with Tammy directing. As usual, Min couldn't be content with standard fare. Hers had to be tea. Special arrangements. "It's not love of tea," Kraft said to Harry, the two of them still sitting while women and children ebbed and flowed past them. "It's her craving for special attention."

"You make it difficult."

"What difficult?"

"*I* was just about to ask for tea, too."

"Oh for God's sake. Of course."

Min turned to Harry, smiling like a cat.

"Guess what; Major Grey."

"Major Grey?" Kraft said, looking around uneasily. "Where?"

"The tea, dear," Min said, not even looking at him—the offhand way one deals with stupid questions from children. And to Harry, "Do you know Ling tea?"

"Of course. But I've had trouble getting it."

"There's this little place on Christopher Street. . . ."

They were off again on a grand tour of Manhattan, walling the others off. For Kraft, this was going too far. Except for politics, Harry was a rational man, a good friend, and absolutely stable. He was above fads and trendy manias. There was some kind of betrayal in his sudden interest in this most unlikely woman.

As for Min, she was getting out of hand too. True, she and Kraft had always played enemies, but there was a kernel of affection in that game. And now she was turning her back on Kraft for a stranger.

"Tomorrow," Min was saying to Harry, "I'll show you something spectacular—rose-hip tea made fresh from the bush."

"My God," Kraft said.

"What's wrong with vitamin C?" Harry asked.

"Perfect for bee stings," Min said. "Snake bites."

"How about cancer?" Tammy asked.

"You don't believe it. I can always tell when you don't believe me." She shrugged off her sister and turned to Kraft. "You make it up very strong as an herbal cure, of course. Here you are in the heart of nature and you don't know about herbal teas? It doesn't make sense. Why, there are about fifty kinds of teas you could make from things right around you."

"Like what?" from Weldon.

"Oh, acorn tea. For warts. And sassafras tea."

"What's that for?" Hildy asked.

"Stomach ache. Also warts."

"Lucky for you we're not warty."

"I could cure you of anything," Min said sweetly, "if you'd just have faith."

"In what?"

"In the cure, Kraft, the cure. In the tea or the herbal incense or the leeches. . . ."

"Leeches!" from Tammy. "They're medieval."

"What are leeches?" from Ric.

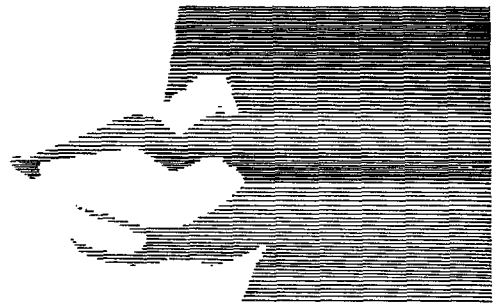
"*Where* do you get your leeches," from Harry.

It was scarcely to be believed. Two members of the educated élite of the most advanced city in the world enthusiastically endorsing a medical practice which was in disrepute by the middle of the 19th century. Were there no limits to this psychic regression?

"But *you*, of course wouldn't approve." Min's voice. It had been directed at him. There was a pause.

"Of course I would," he said, recovering quickly, confounding her with geniality, refusing to be baffled, outraged, raising his glass of Chablis as one might dangle a cross before a demon. "One thing you can learn from your Aunt Min," he said to the children, "is that anything is possible."

"And one thing you can learn from your father," Min said, throaty as a serpent, "is that it takes time for some people to really accept that."



It's time to get the dishes done," Tammy said, her voice cutting through, crisp. "Let's go."

Abruptly she outlined the system—not just for this meal but for all of them. It was, Kraft thought, Tammy at her worst. Tammy as recreational counselor, Tammy as C.O. in a liberated army. Tammy of pep and pepper.

"Breakfasts and lunches we keep simple. Everyone cleans up his own. On supper detail we can use two adults and one child. Those off duty have to go into the living room. No room in that thing we call a kitchen. And," she turned to Harry as the only one who was not familiar with her house rules, "we draw lots for the first shift. Min, Harry, the kids, even me. Equal justice under the law." There was no escaping.

It seemed unlikely that Harry had ever been asked to dry, much less to wash a dish. It was not his style and he carried his style with him wherever he was. He kept it intact under a life-sized plexiglass bubble. He had walked through the student riots in Paris, plastic bombs ricocheting off the invisible shield; he had toured lower Calcutta during the religious uprisings, oblivious to rocks, clubs, mud, dog feces all thrown in his direction, none reaching the immaculate perfection of his linen suit. It was a case of cosmic favoritism.

Even here the bubble walled him off from the task of washing. The lottery went to Kraft and Min with Hildy as the putter-awayer.

Kraft began with an extravagant flourish, pouring scalding water from the kettle held high over the pan and then adding a slosh of cold from the bucket. It was important to demonstrate his complete sobriety. Besides, it was always necessary for him to provide a heightened enthusiasm for the more primitive aspects of the place, Napoleon enthusing over the splendors of a Russian winter.

Kraft had the feeling that his troops were never far from

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outright rebellion. They were forever hinting at the worst sort of so-called improvements. One supper the previous summer they left at his place a page torn from the Montgomery Ward catalogue, an ad for a hand pump which would pull water from the well and force it up to a tank over the sink from which it would flow down through a spigot into the sink just like normal homes, but he had successfully blocked the scheme. "Once you get cold water running through a spigot," he had told them, "you'll start talking about having hot water on demand. I tell you, every one of these innocent little improvements is like giving a drink to an alcoholic." So he had held them off, but there was no telling for how long.

He rolled up his sleeves like a man full of enthusiasm and gave a dishtowel to Min. "Good honest labor," he said. "Good for you. It'll clean out some of that spiritualism."

"And what does it clean out of *you*, Kraft?"

"My bourgeois roots. Simple as that."

He heard Harry's laugh and looked over his shoulder to the flickering image of the living room as seen through the laths. A form on the couch—that would be Tammy—and one now bending over the liquor cabinet—that would be Harry reaching for his cognac and offering one to Tammy, her head nodding, and his voice, low and almost seductive, "Not a bad life, really, as long as you can keep the staff happy."

Kraft let out a yelp of pain. The water had been scalding. "Goddamnit," he said and slopped in more cold. In his rage, he misjudged: the pan was now lukewarm and no more hot in the kettle.

"Just right," he said.

"I knew we would be on the same shift," Min said. "That's the way it worked out the last time, too. You know why?"

"Why?" He didn't want to know, but he didn't want to hear Harry and Tammy talking in the other room either. "Tell me why."

"We're both Gemini."

"Oh, come off it, Min. Aside from the fact that we draw slips of paper on which a dot was drawn, we have absolutely nothing in common. Name one thing."

"Very strong cross currents."

"You're the one who's schizophrenic."

"What's schizophrenic?" Hildy asked.

"It's when the mind works in a different dimension," Min said. She had pulled over a high stool and was sitting there, drying dishes in a desultory manner, dripping water on her long, black skirt and on the floor. She was, Kraft decided, a National Geographic version of the loony at Delphi. "Sometimes a higher dimension than we can imagine."

"She means crazy," Kraft said.

"It can't be both those things," Hildy said.

"Oh, it can," Min said, bending down toward Hildy, nodding wisely. "Those who fear it, give it a bad name."

"Have you ever been schizo . . . what's-it's?"

"Phrenic. Schizo-phrenic. Try it."

"Min! For God's sake."

"Try *saying* it," she said to Hildy. And to Kraft, a reptilian smile on her face, "Afraid of words?"

"Schizo-phrenic. Schizo-phrenic," Hildy chanted, delighted with the sound of it.

From the next room, Tammy's voice, disembodied: "What's that all about?"

"Your sister's catechism."

"Schizo-phrenic. Schizo-phrenic. Schizo-phrenic."

"Cut that out," Kraft said. "Just shut up."

He washed in a fury. Out of the corner of his eye he caught Min performing a pantomime of a petulant child as if saying "Just . . . shut . . . up," bobbing her head with each unspoken word. He thought he heard them giggle.

The silence he had ordered settled on them all like an evening fog. Kraft could hear Tammy saying something to Harry in that low, ironic voice of hers and the two of them laughed. Kraft felt a quick flash of uncertain jealousy, but he put it down almost at once. After all, Harry was old enough to be Tammy's father.

Still, he didn't like the silence. "Dead air" they used to call it in radio. He struggled to fill it with some kind of nonsense, but Min beat him to it.

"Moss," she said suddenly, breathlessly.

"What?"

"Moss."

"That's what I thought you said."

"From the trees."

"That's where it usually is. Yes."

"Moss."

"Right, Min. Coming down from trees." He had stopped washing and was staring at her. Was she at last finally coming apart? Right here? In front of the children? It was hardly fair. "Do you see moss?" he asked. He had lowered his voice as if asking her whether she was having menstrual cramps.

"Where?" she said.

"Where? *I* don't know where."

"Oh, I thought perhaps you were hallucinating. I hoped you had, in fact. It would be a good sign."

"Hallucinating. Min, for Christ's sake, *you* started off talking about moss, right out of a blue sky."

"No, on trees. I saw it hanging on trees coming in here this afternoon. And then I thought, 'No, I couldn't have seen it because moss only grows in the South.' "

"So then you thought *you* were hallucinating. . . ."

"What's hallucinating?" Hildy asked.

"Vision," Min said.

"Everyone has *that*. Like seeing?"

"This is when you see something no one else does."

"Like seeing something from another life?"

"Like being crazy," Kraft said. "It's just part of being crazy."

"Having other lives isn't crazy."

Kraft drew in his breath and let it out slowly. He knew from experience that it didn't pay to hit this one head on. It was an inheritance from Min's last visit the previous summer. He had hoped that Min might be off on some new branch of kookery and that his Hildy would find her former lives withering on the vine. But apparently he was to have no such luck.

"We have to understand," Min said gently to Hildy, "that some people have no sense of their former lives. They just can't feel it. No contact. It's natural for them to label what they don't understand as 'crazy.' We mustn't make

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them feel bad, love."

"We mustn't, mustn't we? You just keep that stuff in your own drafty skull, will you? Just keep your hands off my children."

Min opened her mouth with the shock of some southern belle who has heard an obscene word. "Why Kraft, what incredible things go through your head!"

"Are you two at it again?"—Tammy's voice from the living room, clear as if she were beside them.

"Will you kindly tell your sister what she can do with her reincarnation theories?"

"Reincarnation?"—Harry's disembodied voice.

"She believes in it," Kraft said, pleased to put a wedge in for some reason. "Implicitly."

"Good Lord," he said. "And does this run in families? I mean, are the rest of you reincarnated?"

"I am," Hildy said.

"Are you really?" Harry's voice, genuinely interested. "How do you know? I mean, how can you be sure?"

A snort of laughter from an invisible Weldon. "Because Aunt Min told her so."

"Don't be nasty"—Tammy.

"Never mind my stupid brother," Hildy said to Harry, to Min, to everyone. "He wouldn't see his other lives even if we showed him photographs."

"They didn't even *have* photographs back then, silly."

"Weldon," Harry said, "how can you be sure it's all bunk?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Well, you've got to have some proof, you know. I mean proof that there isn't—well, former lives and all."

"It's common sense."

"Sure, but that's not much of an argument. What if they said the same thing?"

"Then they'd be crazy."

"Right on," Kraft said. And then he regretted it. He hated the way he had to hurt Hildy just to get back at Min. Still, Weldon needed support. Anyone trying to be rational needed support.

"It's a proven fact," Min said. She spoke to empty space, her face aimed somewhere between Kraft and the semi-wall through which their voices came. "Certain people keep seeing these ghost images of their former selves. Mostly in dreams, of course; but sometimes in waking life. Documented cases."

Kraft handed her a serving dish dripping with soap-skimmed water. "Look," he said, "every hallucination by every patient in a booby-hatch can be 'documented.' All you need is a fellow nut to say 'Yes, yes, Jesus stood right there.' That's documentation. Take it from me, Min, history is full of that stuff—from walking on water right down to UFOs. 'Documentation' is the first thing you do to dress up a fraud."

Weldon's laugh drifted through the kitchen as if he were beside them. And from his brother, "Shut up, dummy."

"Hey, Ric," a father's appeal, "you're not falling for this are you?"

"It's nothing to laugh about."

So the black plague had broken out where least expected. Ric, outgoing, healthy, the fisherman and sportsman. Almost too close to a boy scout. Uncorruptible. Now tainted.

"Laugh?" Kraft said. "I find it hilarious."

"No, you don't," Min said. "Not at all."

A moment of silence. Kraft had the uneasy feeling that they were all making a judgment on him, a verdict. Rum swirled in his brain and he squinted to keep Min from going out of focus.

"Look," he said, his voice low with sullen rage, "when I say *hilarious* I mean *hilarious*."

And from the other room: "You know what Hildy thinks she was?" Weldon's voice. Uncharacteristically nasty. Was he coming to the defense of this father?

"No fair," Hildy said.

"A princess"—Weldon's voice. "A little storybook princess."

"Well, it's true," Hildy said. Her eyes were brimming.

Kraft opened his mouth, caught between gratitude to Weldon for being his sole defender and love for Hildy, his beautiful little princess.

"*Prin*-cess Hildy"—Weldon's voice at its very worst.

"Shut *up*," from Hildy.

"Come on now," Kraft said to her, his voice low, "Princesses don't cry."

The wrong move. "I'm not a princess *now*, dummy," and a flood of tears. Laughter from the other room. A shout of protest from Ric.

Kraft leaned against the sink, his head humming. A week ago he had been absolutely alone—chatting to himself and others, yes, but alone. And in control. Now this. The incredible complexity of it. The cross currents. It scarcely seemed possible that all over the country there were individuals trying to be fathers, husbands, lovers, hosts, and independent agents all at the same time. No, it was more than that. There were more roles to act out, roles for which there were no prepared scripts. No wonder historians—true historians—never touched on the present. Nothing about the present was ever solid, properly documented.

He put down a dripping pan and located his rum glass among the dirty dishes, drained the remains, and poured himself another. Splash of water from the ladle. No ice left. Nasty taste. He tried recalling a notion about roles to play without prepared scripts but couldn't locate it—a lost telephone number.

What was it about his family and friends that made things so damned difficult? Why couldn't they be manageable, stay in place? There was something terribly wrong with the age he was living in—the worst decade of the worst century. In the thirties they would have been drawn together in poverty, the common cause, the collective agony. Earlier—19th or 18th centuries—they could have shared the effort of agriculture, working in the fields by day, reading the Bible aloud in the evening around the single lamp. A better opiate than *things*, for God's sake.

Here they were, sniping, tearing at each other with crazy theories, flying apart like the cosmos after that great explosion. He had a sudden impulse to leave them all, to go up to his study, to lock the door, to plunge himself into the manuscript, into his psycho-historical analysis of Roosevelt's fireside chats. How rational, how pure and clear they were, compared with all this crazy stuff.

"All right, kids," Tammy's voice, commanding, "time to

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hit the sack." Army talk.

Like the cavalry, Kraft thought. In the nick of time. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was ten o'clock, their summer bedtime. Why hadn't he thought of that? There he was, trying to battle the age and defend himself against the tyranny of children and save his princess daughter, when all he had to do was to order them to bed. Tammy had saved him—her respect for schedules and the order of the day's events matched his own reverence for dates and the intermeshing of history. Well, to hell with that. He should be able to fight his own battles, to wipe away the corruptions of a bourgeois society, to protect his family, to protect himself.

Upstairs he heard the children complaining. It would be a long session for Tammy, calming them down. How was a man to raise children to be obedient and at the same time protestors? It was turning into an evening of questions and no answers.

The form which was Harry crossed the living room and turned on the portable radio. A crackle of stations and then a Mahler symphony. That would be CBC. It was too romantic for Kraft's taste, but it did block out the sound of the children upstairs. Harry was a simple man of action.

The form crossed the room again and became visible in the doorway. "Poor Min!" he said, all this work and no one offered you a drink." Poor Min, yet! "What will it be?"

She asked for a brandy and Harry went back to the living room to get the bottle. Kraft downed the remains of his rum, ignoring the streaks of soapy water down the sides.

There was, of course, no reason Harry should have offered a drink to Kraft, too. The bottle was right there by the sink. Still, there was something insulting about Harry returning with a snifter for Min, his own drink in the other hand, simply *assuming* that Kraft would not or should not have an after-dinner drink. He poured himself another, casually turning his back on the two as he did so, half expecting a reprimand.

"That's too bad," Harry said, "their being rounded up and herded off like that. I was just beginning to learn something. All that reincarnation stuff."

"It's no joke," Kraft said.

"I thought you thought it was."

"It's no joke the way Min has dumped all that psychic junk on my children."

"It's not really me," she said with a weary little shrug. "I just give words for what they sense from their unconscious. Children," she said to Harry, "are naturally psychic."

And then without apology the two of them left Kraft to finish up in the kitchen. He thought of quitting, leaving the place in a mess, but finishing was a part of the system; and system, Kraft reminded himself, was all that kept the place from turning into a loony bin.

He carried the scummy dish water out to the back steps and slopped it into the dark; he mopped off the drain board, hung up the sodden towels. How was it that someone who could gore *Time* into doing an outraged review of his first full-length book of historical analysis could not so much as prick the conscience of two self-invited house guests?

When he finished, everything was in its place: pan hanging on the pan hook, ladle on the ladle nail, mixing bowls on the bowl shelf, nested, towels on the towel rack. And his hand shook as he poured himself one last drink.

When he re-entered the living room they were standing in front of the Franklin stove, speaking to each other in such intimate tones that they were no more than inches apart. Harry and Min!

"Hey!" Kraft said, a protest.

"What's the matter?" Harry said, stepping back from Min.

"A hell of a kitchen worker *you* are," Kraft said.

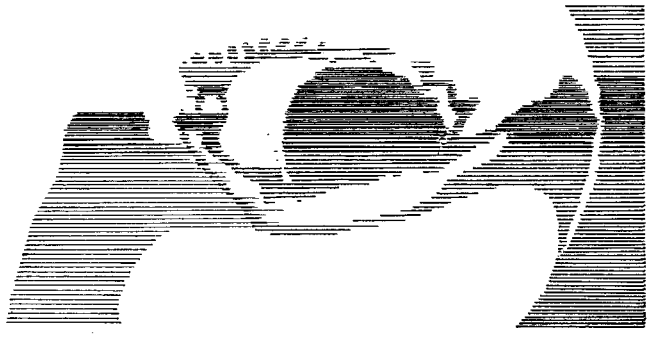
Min drew herself up. "I've never been deeply thrilled by that sort of work. Besides, I thought we were through."

"Well, I'm not through with what you're doing with my kids. I want you to stop. . . ." He paused, head fluid; the couple before him blurred. No, they were clear but he, Kraft, was blurring. They were clearly what they always had been; he was the one who was slipping, skidding.

"Have a seat," Harry said.

"You're sick," Min said.

He was not sick and he would not take a seat. But he did manage to find the door frame and gripped it, keeping it from falling.



It must have failed him—like everything else that evening—because they were negotiating steps now, one at a time. His arms were over their shoulders. He could smell after-shave.

The door frame to the bedroom moved toward him. Somehow it slid around all three of them and disappeared behind. The bed rose to him and he lay there, spread-eagled while these two people removed his shirt and pants, talking to each other in brief, low phrases as if he were not quite there.

It was not surprising that he should be put to bed. That was a part of the order of things. And the feminine hand that wiped the sweat from his brow was not unfamiliar. It was beautifully, reassuringly familiar. But how strange to have *him* up here, too, to have him share in the ritual of going to bed. Strange to have him gentle and understanding for a change.

What could have brought the two of them together like that? What could have happened to have mellowed his father? Was the old bastard going senile at last? Sick and senile?

Or was it the other way around?

"Is it me?" he asked. "Is it me who's slipping?" □

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Melissa & McGonnegal
or, Alces in Wonderland

Some items of passing interest: WILLIAM D. BERRY lives in Fairbanks, Alaska; Alces *is the scientific name for moose (as in* Alces americana*); Melissa is 5' 9'' tall, while McGonnegal stands 6' 4'' at the shoulder, and "In case anybody ever asks," writes Berry, "they are dancing to one of the numbers out of Tchaikovsky's 'Sleeping Beauty' ballet."*

Note: All 15 Melissa & McGonnegal drawings are available on a 23 x 45 inch poster printed in two colors on heavy paper and suitable for hanging or framing. Send $3.00 (check or money order) to the North American Review, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613. The poster will be sent to you, prepaid, in a sturdy mailing tube.

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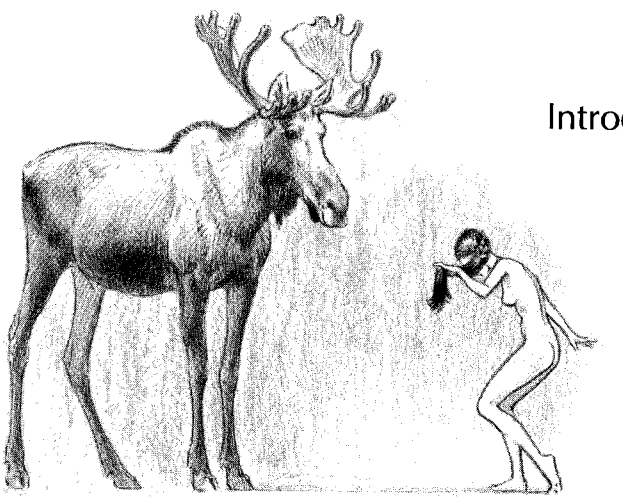
DRAWINGS AND TEXT
BY WILLIAM D. BERRY

McGonnegal is the resident moose of Windy Pass. He is a very large moose—as are all Alaskan moose—but he is tamer than most. Both his exceptional size and his benign temperament have been attributed to the gallon of home brew that he guzzles daily from his bucket on the porch of the Ram's Rest Roadhouse and Bar. He disdains hard liquor and most drugs, although he once consumed a row of Lennie the painter's prime *Cannabis* that was flourishing along the south side of the cabin; it did not appear to have any effect on him. Probably one of the difficulties inherent in being a moose is that relatively few things *do* seem to make much difference, which may be why the big beasts seem to have such an air of resignation about them.

Melissa is Lennie's girlfriend; that is, she shares his cabin when she feels like it. She is an odd girl, uncommunicative in an unexpected way: she never speaks. The fact that Lennie never seems to stop talking may be one explanation for her silence, for listening to his endless theories about his life and his art, explanations of what *might* be, may well have disillusioned her about words. Certainly she listens with considerable intelligence, but her glance usually suggests, disconcertingly, that what she has found out was not the same as what she was told. There is a theatrical air about her, too, as if she might once have belonged on the stage. Perhaps, captivated by the role of mime, she sensed the potential of a world where touch and gesture were the only means of communication; a world forgotten by man upon his enthusiastic conversion to Speech. To get to know Melissa is to discover oneself playing a role in some cosmic comedy where the script is known only to its author, but all the players—from man to mosquito—seem to have equal billing.

Only as sensitive a soul as Melissa could ever have suspected that McGonnegal wanted to dance. Afterwards, it seemed quite logical. There is something about the careful way a moose moves—even more, about the way it just stands around a great deal of the time, as if it would like to try something different, but is not sure what—that gave the girl the clue. One summer morning, she showed McGonnegal the way. . .



Introduction. . . .

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Demonstration. . . .

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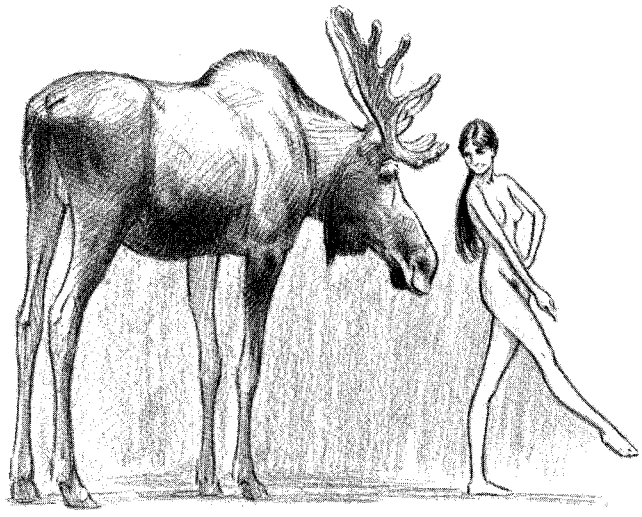
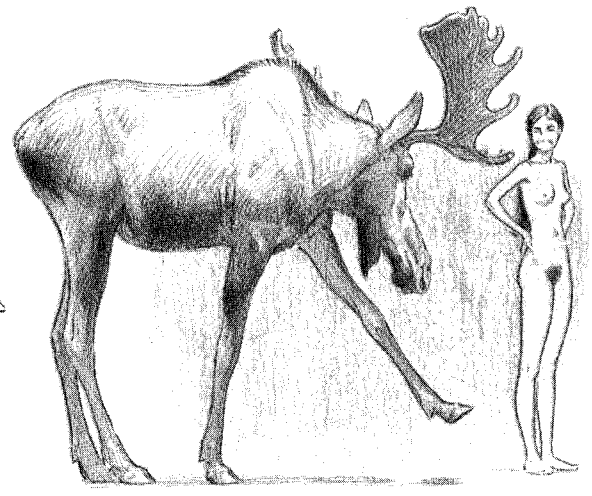
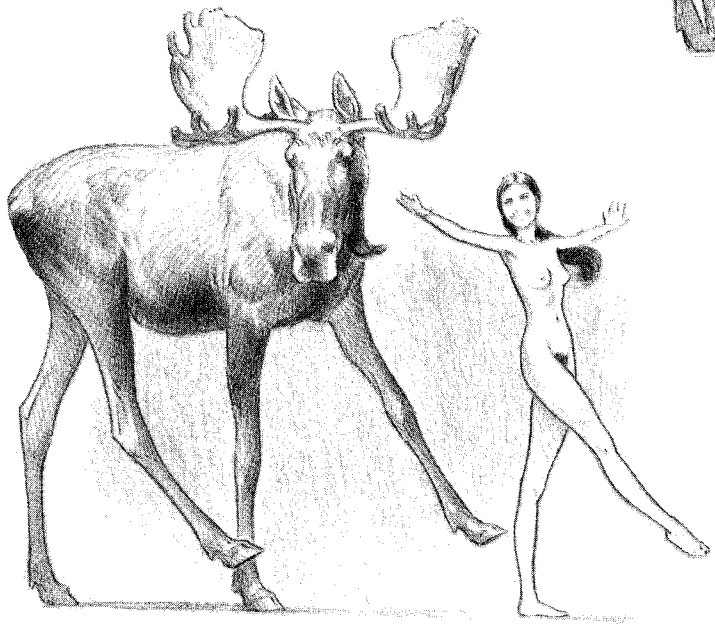
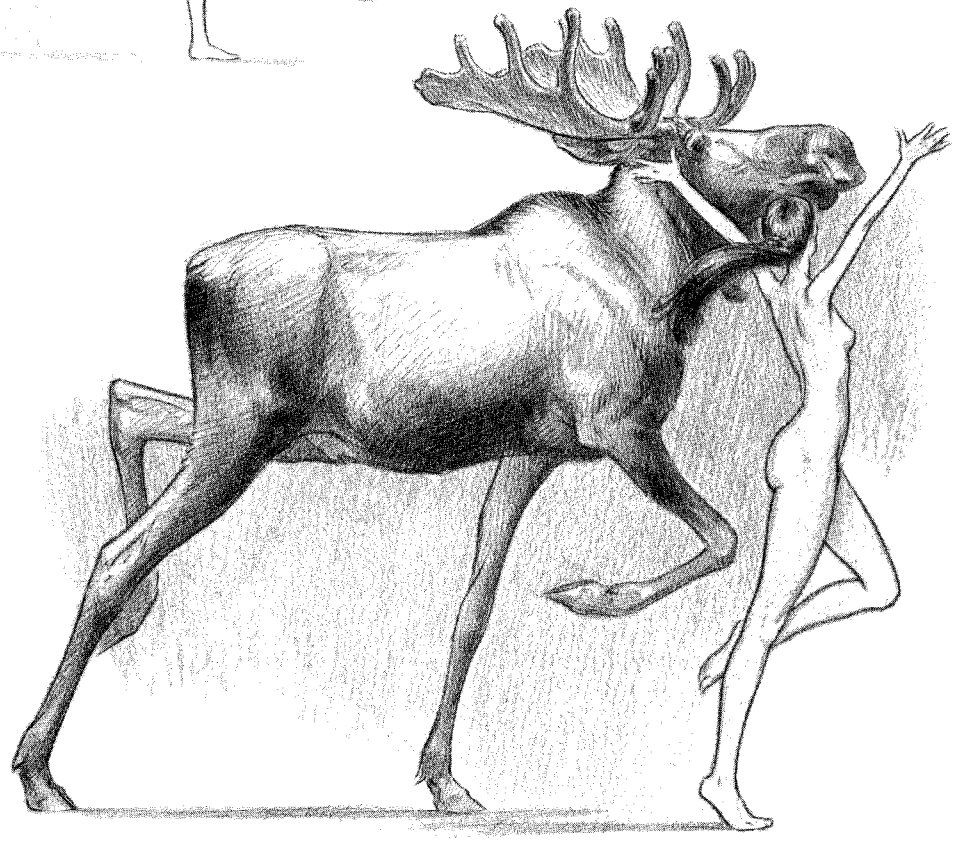






Instruction, and. . . .



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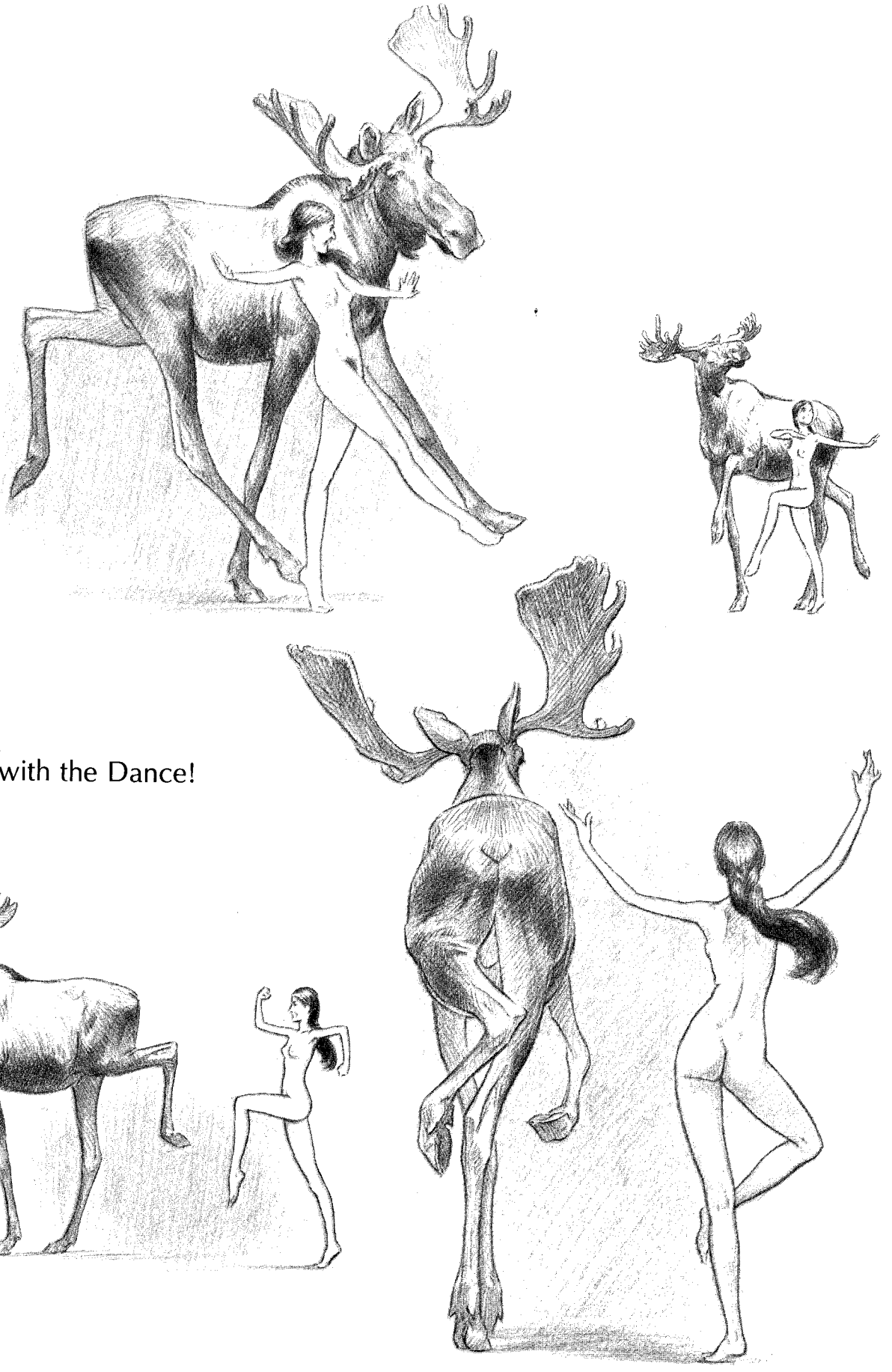

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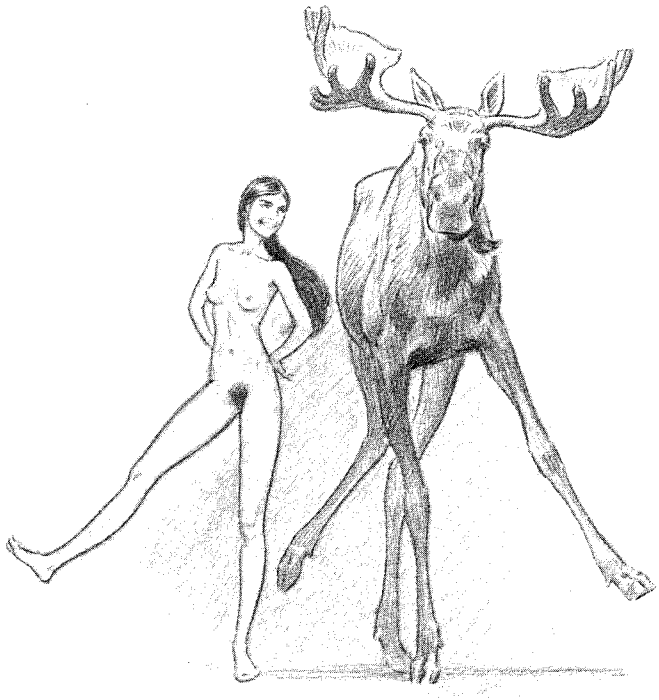

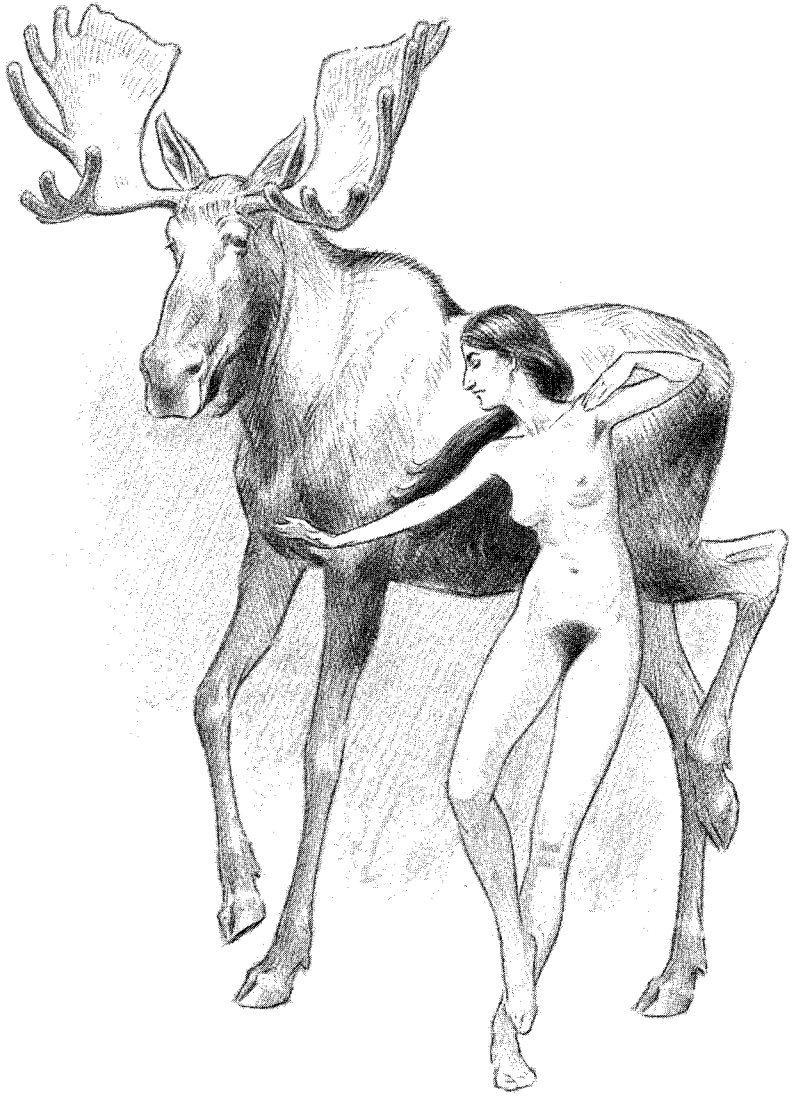

Finale.

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FICTION BY WILLIAM RUDOLPH

SOME CHAPTERS IN THE LIFE OF THE AMERICAN PRACTICAL NAVIGATOR

1. All You Can Eat

The river was rolling on just like the old lyrics claimed, words built by Woody Guthrie into a monument for the Army Corps of Engineers. There wasn't a word about the salmon and the spear-fishing that used to go on around the Colville Reservation. The fish had a hard time getting through that wet cement dream. Only welfare checks were hardy enough to make it upstream through the fish ladder. But despite all the tampering, the Columbia was still rolling, riding like a slow freight into winter. Our Navigator was not much of a river man and felt no great need to live close by it. The pickle works, a glue factory, burger stands and used car lots barricaded the very thought that a great American river might be coursing in the vicinity. The strength of its unwinding thrust was dampened by the continual rain. It seemed to catch its breath going by Portland, preparing for the last sprint to the Pacific. There was a cold anticipation of the spring freshet. In fact, the only warmth injected into this scene was courtesy of the AEC, who discharged hot water from their reactors upriver at Hanford.

This was all going on back in the days before plutonium electricity was a mixed blessing. But the fact that things would not get any better was only a garbled message in those days. The squalls that belched down through the Columbia Gorge politely covered the tracks of any radioactive gremlins. But the Navigator could feel vague stirrings in the dripping evenings, like in a theatre before the lights went up, after watching a movie that very nearly succeeded in fording the River of Profits but faltered in midstream, in deep water, flailing with human feeling and movement dictated by financial solvency.

"Where did you go last night?"

"I went to see a movie called the American West."

"Was it any good?"

"It began with noble intentions but the pioneers were soon aiming for the box office."

"Well, the movies are business, aren't they?"

"Herbert Hoover said that the business of America was business."

"Didn't that Great Depression start during his term of office?"

"It's hard to say. . . . I think the secret of the movie I saw was that depression was there all the time, corraled like fear in a circle of covered wagons."

"You lost me on that one. But say, wasn't Hoover the one who had a dam named for him?"

Those wet evenings were murderous. Thoughts moved in

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constant circles, though not really vicious ones. The weather dampened that. And the river moving nearby provided an illusion of continuity. The Navigator was then an eighteen-year-old monkey on a string, sure that he was the latest evolutionary model for 1962. When he glanced at his feet he thought of slowly receding little toes. Checking his teeth in the mirror, he saw blunted fading reminders of man's raw flesh phase. The Navigator was working into his strung out phase.

He spent Sunday afternoons trying to forget he was going to college. He worked out in the old Reed College gym, practicing the mountain climbing techniques he was learning on week nights. Climbing mountains in a gym required imagination. He was learning to rappel from the balcony to the basketball court. He told himself that he was hanging from one of the fantastic cliffs up at the Dalles, some miles upstream where the whole history of the Columbia Basin unfolded in chapters of colored rock. The great drafts in the old gym became howling gales and the high wall gave way to the faces of cliffs, etched and split from countless icestorms barreling in from the east, funneling through that big ditch to catch rock climbers by their fingers and noses and freeze them in icy bearhugs.

One Sunday he slipped down the wall, bouncing away from the dangerous wooden cliff with his feet and shoulders and came to a crotch grating halt ten feet off the floor near a group of juniors shooting baskets. He braced his feet against the wall and gazed through the smack of the dribbling.

As near as he could make out, he was still at the Dalles. Dark clouds fumed down the gorge. A single navigation light blinked out of the desolate river landscape, winking from the north shore that rose into the wheat country of Washington. He could feel the vibration from the upriver dynamos where electricity was produced in order to bring Lawrence Welk into the homes of all the subsidized farmers, to warm radios with the Message of Christian Freedom while the wheat men fired off letters to the Department of Agriculture on their IBM typewriters. The dynamos churned with a non-stop sense of duty as the farmers, letters in hands, sniffed the air between warm house and cold Cadillac, the word *snow* whispering into the backs of their minds, bringing a squinty, old-fashioned gray to their eyes, a true pioneer expression and leftover genetic sparkle from their grandfathers *way back when*, the late ones who were unfortunate enough to still be thrashing around the Snake River in the middle of fall in that old oxen wagon routine sometime before the electronics/aerospace boom.

Here was our Navigator, dangling near the finish line of Lewis and Clark's glorious race with Manifest Destiny, a finish now marked by cheap housing, a niche left behind by the '30s that fits Portland today as perfectly as it did then. Could Meriwether Lewis ever have visualized pickle vats on these bright shores where venison once roasted and Indians held the checkered flag?

And who was holding it for our Navigator? He had to read two hundred pages of Herodotus, work five physics problems and figure out what a Cauchy sequence was by the next morning. He was still dangling, defying his physics book, defying science, defying the whole western tradition. But the power of gravity was rapidly overcoming his various coefficients of friction. He could feel the attraction between

his body and the center of the earth. His muscles quivered from it. The ice storm swept before his eyes, the farmers climbed in their Cadillacs and drove off, speaking of conspiracies to one another in code over their CB radios. They were planning another 'Impeach Earl Warren' billboard and proposed another salmon colored leaflet exposing Reed College as a hotbed of International Communism and an extension of the Asian Jewish Conspiracy.

He kissed terra firma with the soles of his sneakers, took a quick shower and walked back to the dormitory, wondering vaguely about dinner. This was the one night a week Commons was closed. When he reached his building he was greeted with the aroma of frying horsemeat. The hallway trapped the galloping scent and smoke of it. He had a momentary dream of the '30s, a vivid Portland hanging to both sides of the Willamette River by its finger nails, cumulus clouds of horsemeat smoke hanging over the windless valley, drenching the town in greasy horsemeat caresses.

The Navigator was not the only one moved by the smell. Two of his friends were on their way out. They invited him along. He put Herodotus in his back pocket and they left campus. Their destination lay on the other side of the Southern Pacific yards, a cheap spoon called 'ALL YOU CAN EAT FOR $1.09.'

With the rain, the yards were more forbidding than any Dos Passos novel. It positively killed speech. The Navigator thought of the days of steam, when helpful firemen tossed coal from the tenders as the freights slowed by each Hooverville, gifts for out-of-workers, fellows who weren't lucky enough to make it up to Grand Coulee for the big scene

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WILLIAM RUDOLPH lives in Washington—the state—and writes that he spends the summer hunting salmon in the North Pacific, the winter "hibernating in the rain forest, sharpening hooks."

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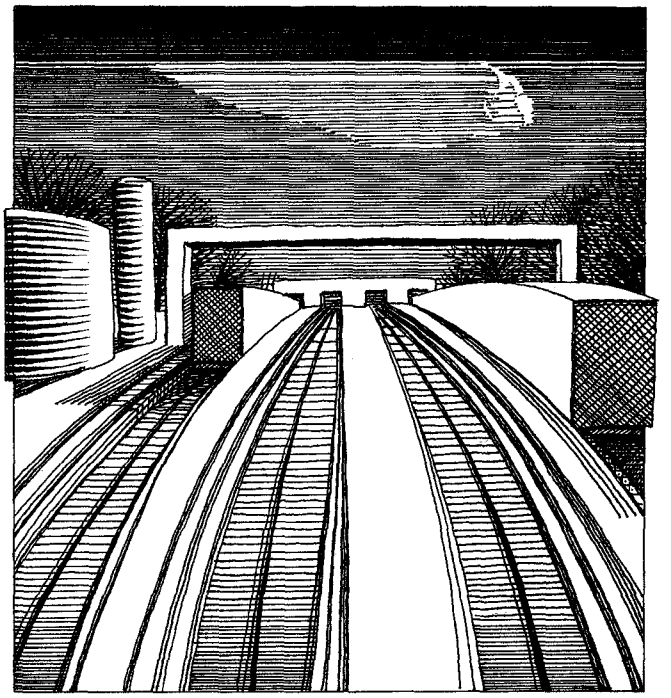

Woody Guthrie was hired to write songs about.

Night was coming on. The high floodlights over the yard made the rain look like tracer fire. Boxcars coupled with a crunch, knuckling up in tightening knots of monopolistic secrecy. Strange switchman's jargon chalked on their sides spoke of constrictive trade practices. They sidestepped the ghost of Frank Norris and made it to the restaurant where knife, fork, spoon, garbanzos, kidney beans, romaine, endive, mashed potatoes, gravy, fried chicken, ravioli, halibut, green Jello nightmare desert and coffee, tea or milk waited for them.

A mouth stuffing contest followed. The Navigator won the first round and retired. Dave went back for seconds while the Navigator perused Herodotus. Todd was belching the hummingbird tongues and smiling at families eating their starchy way above poverty level.

"Herodotus reports here that Egyptians were possessed of black semen."

"He was writing for an audience of gross misconceptions."

The Navigator ruminated on the journal of Meriwether Lewis, who shot the stars from the Great Plains and carried his sextant over the Continental Divide, forced to acknowledge the passion of his men only by the parcel of mercury ointment he carried to ease the pain of their Indian welcome. Who would get Guggenheim money now to tramp cross country and catalogue results of an infectious native welcome? His boots broke twigs a few miles from this very naugahyde booth! But a bush league traveloguer, no doubt, compared to Herodotus.

They were headed home now and faced with a colder and wetter night. Before they crossed the yards each of them had left the greater part of his meal behind. Dave had just stuck his finger down his throat when an old bum appeared on the tracks and motioned them over in the lee of a B&O hopper car.

"Hey, any of you guys got a quarter to spare?"

They had already pooled $3.27 for their poisonous meal and were nearly broke until next month's letter from home. Dave wiped his finger on his jacket, twitched his fingers and slipped them in his pocket where he fondled a nickel and three pennies.

"Well, Chief, this is all I got." He dropped the eight cents into the old man's palm.

The old bum snorted but smiled, and began to talk out of the corner of his mouth. "Times ain't nearly as flush as they're supposed to be," he said. "The goddamned city of Seattle gave us all one-way tickets out of town to clear out Skid Road for their fucking World's Fair, just on account somebody wrote a book about it and now the tourists are gonna be poking around. Ain't that the shits! Treat you like dirt and sweep you right out the back door. . . ."

He made a fist around the coins and shook them like a rattle to conjure up the rest of his words. "Why, hell, up in Aberdeen, in '34, times was so flush, that place was one big cathouse . . . and the rest of the country was starved shitless. There was so many jobs up in the woods, there were hiring lines up in the trees. Soon as one guy got killed, they hired another guy to take his place. They just hauled the bodies behind stumps until it got dark and when they choked them last logs, they just tied the poor bastards on and hauled them in. Got any smokes?"

His smile said, Hey, you guys, I got all you can eat for eight cents and a couple of cigarettes.

They waved goodbye and headed back to the books. The Navigator sat at his desk for nearly an hour before he realized he had lost his physics assignment. He was thinking he might try working in the woods. He decided to walk over to Animal's place to get the problems. It would clear his head.

Animal lived a few blocks off campus. He rented the crawl space of a student house for five dollars a month. The Navigator made like a rat and crawled in, heading for the dim light bulb under the kitchen floor. A full sleeping bag showed little sign of life until an elbow popped out like a new bud. His sudden presence had disturbed the little thermostat on the ancient electric heater and it purred to life. This made him feel very uneasy. He tapped an empty wine jug and almost wished for a second that he, too, had a fantasy to live out. There was a petition against HUAC tacked to a nearby floor timber. He did not feel at home in the underground life.

A girl's head rose from the bag, turtle-like, and looked his way. "Somebody's here," she said, sleepily, speaking to the other bulges in the bag.

The Navigator recognized his former lab partner. She greeted him with slight embarrassment. As late as the Friday before, they had been probing the secrets of mechanics together. While he measured the rate of descent of steel balls down inclined planes she had held the stopwatch and tapped off the seconds with a finger on the inside of his thigh.

Animal stuck his head out in the damp air and sniffed. "Hi, buddy, you don't look so good."

"Something I ate didn't agree with me."

The girl was whistling the theme from 'Jules et Jim.'

"You have those problems?"

"Which ones? I got all kinds, physical, mental, spiders,

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mice, arthritis, and I can't even get it up this afternoon . . . must have something to do with Sundays." He scratched his head. "Did you know I just decided the capitalistic system can only support its progressive economy through war production? Technology and warfare are the causes of future depressions, the financial end of it is creeping into our bodies and affecting certain natural functions. . . ."

"You said it," said the Navigator's former lab partner.

"And you just want a few measly physics problems. You think life is a big puzzle and given the variables and the constants you can come up with the answers."

"The answers are already in the back of the book. I just want to get from one place to the other, that's all."

"Then you should study navigation. Read some Bowditch, Navigator."

"Thanks for the advice."

"On second thought, try the *I Ching*, the oldest treatise on navigation I can think of. If you run across anything about steering out of Sunday night funk, let me know; hey, I haven't got those physics problems, anyway. I'm quitting physics. The two of us are making a pilgrimage to anthropology next term. You came down to the animal shelter for nothing."

The Navigator shrugged and crawled toward the vent screen, reminded of an underwater escape scene from a submarine movie. His stomach felt pinched.

"Say hello to that world of quiet cannibalism for us," Animal snickered.

"I guess I won't be seeing you at lab any more," said the Navigator's former timekeeper, making her lips like Jeanne Moreau's.

He went back to his room and sat once more at his desk. He looked out the window at the roof of Eliot Hall across the way and saw a large sign there, visible at certain times of the year. Tonight he could read it clearly. ALL YOU CAN EAT FOR $2500 A YEAR.

He felt no further inclination to track down his physics, but, on impulse, he opened his textbook. A rifleman was waiting for him. Together with his rifle he stood on roller skates and fired ten shots horizontally from an automatic rifle. Each bullet weighed 0.0257 lb. (180 grains) and had a muzzle velocity of 2500 ft./second.

His first shot was low.

The second bullet knocked out a blinker light on the Columbia.

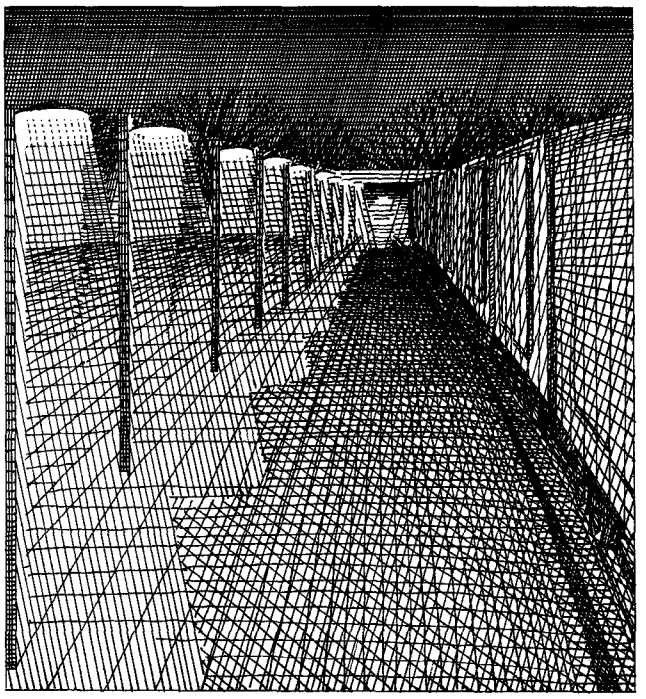
The third entered the brain of a Wall Street banker in 1930.

The fourth one killed a logger in the Everett Massacre of 1916.

The fifth one blasted through the plank door of an empty outhouse behind a prospector's shack near Lee Vining, California, in 1876.

The sixth one passed cleanly through the buttocks of Meriwether Lewis in 1806.

The last four had so much English on them they turned into this story. □



2. Girl Scout Train

The sawdust truck rumbled down the Blue Slide Road outside Thompson Falls, Montana. The driver of the truck held a cold can of beer between his legs. He licked the foam off his lips and touched the brim of his yellow straw cowboy hat.

A train whistle blew and he let up on the gas. The truck slowed at the bend before the crossing. He slid a bit towards the door and his wet shirt came unstuck from the back of the seat, ripping like a scab.

"That sounded like a good one," said his passenger. "Sometimes I wonder what we're doing here. . . ."

". . . disguised as a couple of fried eggs on the seat of an old Chevy truck?" He looked in the rear view mirror and saw the dust he had raised still hanging a few feet over the road. The whistle blew again and he put his foot on the brake.

"I can't see any train."

"It's a dangerous crossing with that curve. This is western Montana's answer to the population explosion."

The truck jerked to a stop. They could feel the train through the ground. They sat and quietly drank their beer, watching the low hills beyond the tracks which came out of a small draw with cottonwoods on both sides of the rails. There was an old farmhouse on top of one of the hills, surrounded by cattle which looked like stumps. On the higher hills were stands of very thin pine trees.

They drove the truck home from work every day with a load of sawdust from the small mill where they worked. The driver made $1.85 an hour and his rider made an even two dollars because he was the boss's son and knew his way around better. They had come over from Seattle to help with some rush orders. The mill made prefabricated log cabins and shipped all the pieces including instruction sheets back

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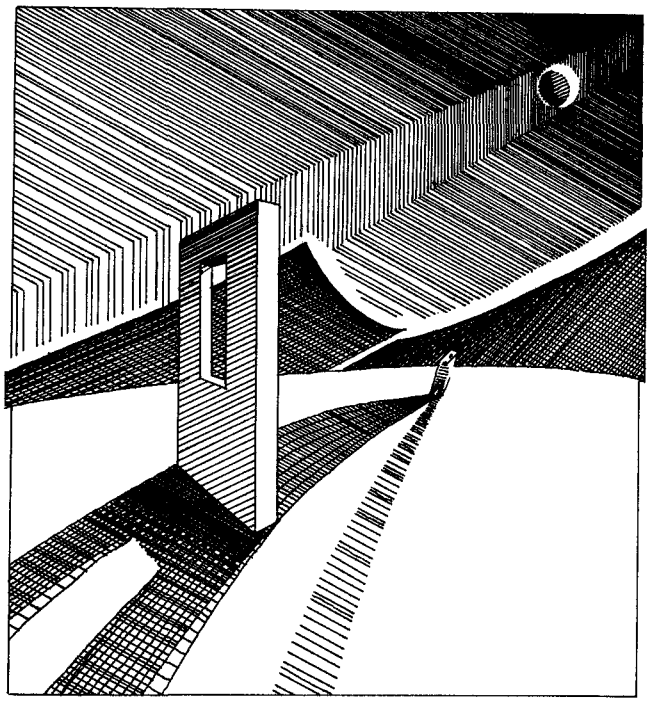


to fictional parts of the country like Iowa and Ohio where they were the rage. The owner wanted his son to take over the business but the kid studied Chinese at the University of Washington and didn't much want anything to do with the homes of future presidents. He had spent a lot of time bumming around in Japan and Taiwan and had written some stories about kind-hearted whores. He got one published in a men's magazine and made ninety dollars. It began like this, "I was sitting at the bar, expertly cracking watermelon seeds between my teeth when this, etc." He had convinced himself to return to Asia and the money he was making now would go for his passage. The driver of the truck was thinking of going along. They had already composed a letter to the China Merchant Steam & Navigation Company to find out when the next ship hit the coast.

At this time, our Navigator did not think of himself as such. He had flunked out of college, worked in Alaska and now found himself in Montana with a fresh vaccination scar, thinking about China. He was steering a risky course through the shoals of the Selective Service System which had little to do with procedures of safe passage. No navigator likes to admit he is lost, but it was true, his bearings had nearly disappeared. The only sign appeared to be a few watermelon seeds under a bar stool thousands of miles away.

"When we get to Taiwan," said his friend, "we'll scrape up some dough and open a bar for expatriate Americans and call it 'The Cowboy Bar.' They go apeshit over cowboys. You could teach English, to stay solvent."

The week before, they had watched the Watts riots on TV. This nearly settled the matter. They would move to Taipei and make it more famous than the Paris of the '20s.

But at other times, like when he had just emptied the sawdust in the cow pasture and was chasing the beasts around over the bumpy ground, he felt perfectly satisfied with his lot.

The train came into view and slowed as it approached. "I'm going to stretch my legs," said the driver. They both got out with their beers and sat on the front fenders, moved by the sudden thrill of a passing train, the anticipation growing every second.

The Northern Pacific caterwauled. It was slowing down more all the time. The fender sitters looked at one another, puzzled.

The train came to rest with half of it on the east side of the crossing and half of it on the west side of the crossing.

"Now that's what I call perfect."

They sat and watched the wheezing passenger train blocking their path. There was no obvious explanation.

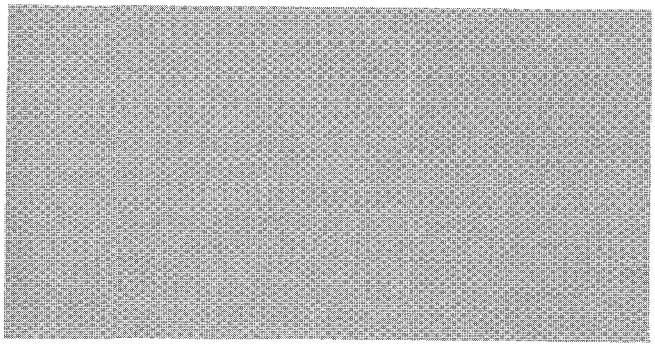
Soon, some young girls were watching them. They leaned out the doors between cars and giggled. One of them asked, "Are you cowboys?"

"Nope, we make perfect log cabins."

"We're all Girl Scouts going to the Jamboree. This whole train is nothing but Girl Scouts!"

The fender sitters laughed. They weren't in any hurry. Someone on the train pointed a Polaroid at them, counted to sixty and pulled out the picture. She wrote '2 cowboys in Montana' in the border and the date, 7/17/65.

Now, that's what I call perfect. □



3. Wars of the Heart (A Few Skirmishes, Anyway)

Stealth in matters of the heart was not one of his strong points. However, one night he crawled through a girl's bedroom window, a doomed attempt at beery reconciliation. If his action was a sign of caring, she was too perturbed to realize it. The heap on the floor was beneath pity, except his own. She threatened him with a plastic bucket of water and he laughed in her face, knowing that none of this would have happened if she had simply opened the door at his knock.

He moved with the illusion that they should talk, an ailment he had picked up from her and D.H. Lawrence's books. They were both too lonely to recognize that lack of true feeling between them.

But the water was a cleansing agent. Things were truly over now. The great gaps between people were showing their teeth.

"What if someone else had been here?" She railed, running to the kitchen for a refill.

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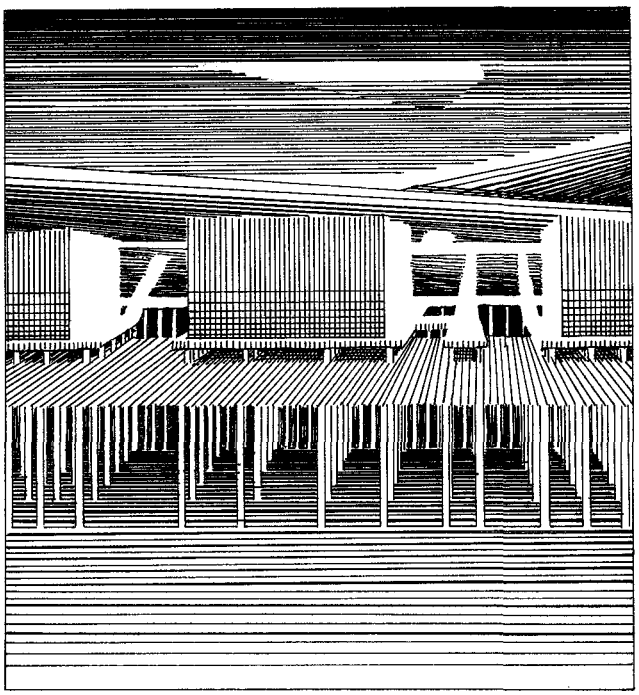


"I know you," he said curiously.

She turned off the tap, mistaking his words for truth.

He spent the rest of the night as a grub, cocooned in her sandy sleeping bag in a gritty sweat, thinking that she had been to the beach with someone else. He lay in the chastity bag, close to her snorting bronchial dreams, remembering the time she had physically tackled him and exhorted a promise. Never leave again. But it was spring and the seasonal rut had begun. He had to go north and perform his stalky form of living, looking for schools of fish and making false long-distance promises. Never leave again. He knew only that compromise was no way to begin life over.

After the last relatively frigid spawning summer rubbed off a bit on him, he showed up at her door, looking for lost things. Her six cats laughed at him from the windows. "You again?" laughed their insolent eyes. Snow was beginning to fall.

After a conversation of nearly unbearable politeness, long enough for the flakes to paralyze the city, his car was stuck and, of all things, it was New Year's Eve. She had a jug of wine and shared it, making offhand remarks about the sleeping bag. He wondered how much sand was in it by now.

The pipes froze and the toilet wouldn't flush. Her houseboat shook from blasts of wind which spiraled across the lake. He showed her how to draw water from the lake with her plastic bucket and fill the toilet tank to insure the hydrodynamics of the bathroom. She cooked him a cheese sandwich and he began to feel like the seventh cat. He spent the storm drawing water and fooling with a propane torch, thinking of the wigs over the tub, hanging from nails like scalps one of his ancestors sold to the Army for 25 dollars apiece. The night was gritty and the New Year was, too.

He returned once more that year, after checking the weather. But she was getting ready to go out and poured him only half a glass of wine.

"What's new?" she asked, pulling her jeans off.

He watched those legs of times past. "I'm working on a book."

"Always the clown." She put on a ruffled blouse and he heard a flamenco guitar backing up her clothes being put on.

"Do something for me, please. . . . I'm in an awful hurry."

He found himself spooning her darling cat droppings from the catbox, figuring out the last remarks would be something like this:

"Friends, still . . ."

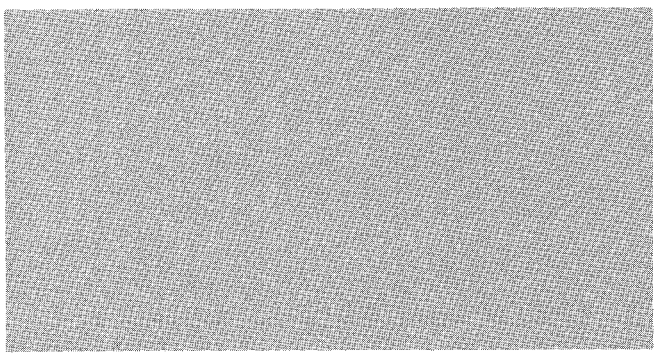
"Yes, friends."

"Drop by again."

While he was out on the deck doing half a glass of wine's worth of wages, she called.

"Remember how you always used to complain of the smell!"

Did he ever. Some Freudian lint clinging to his brain suddenly rearranged itself like iron filings in the neighborhood of a magnet, a ferrous card section spelling out 'morbid joy.' He stopped digging for truth with her tablespoon in that synthetic highly absorbent earth. □



4. The Wheel of Progress

Beneath the drinkers, eels scratched their backs against the old pilings. Cod hunted needlefish, king salmon chased herring across the small bay. Eat or be eaten, raw capitalism, watered-down Jack London, call it what you will, still a natural world of cold bloods and eyes that never blinked. With a bay for its basement, the bar exerted a watery nostalgia for 1200-year-old Chinese drunks and the clutter of alcoholic poems they left drifting behind them. The modern art of navigation has little faith in drifting but these old Chinese knew their currents, the joyful upwellings and Gulf Streams of the heart. Today, the Hydrographic Office compiles tables of velocity and direction for purposes of prediction, lending a false sense of precision to the future. The Chinese knew that true drifts run too slow to be measured.

It would be pleasing to say the bar simply drifted up the rocky channel into the bay, but reality requires a tow. A thirsty, enterprising Alaskan was responsible for its present

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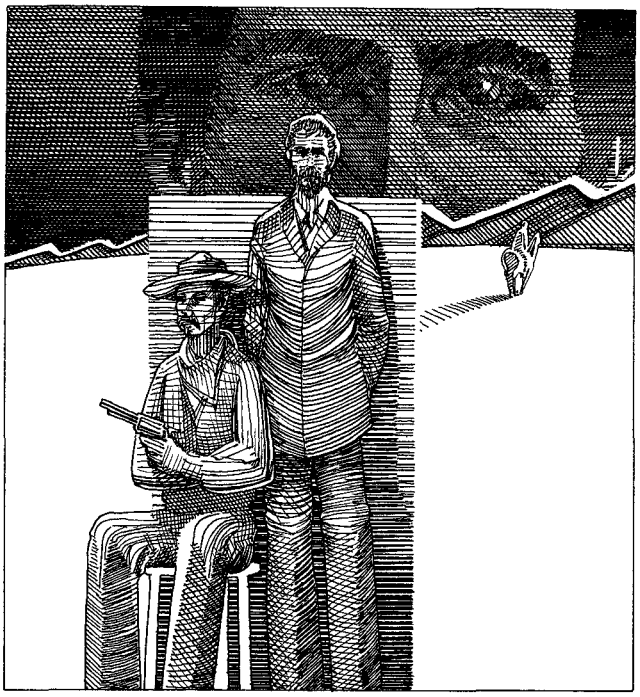

anchorage, where it now floats above the cold law of fang and claw and bows to the moon twice a day, carrying drinkers along with the religious gesture. The effects of tide on local consumption are not known, but the Navigator, during an evening session, concluded that thirst was stimulated somehow, perhaps by the old complements of blood and sea water. Everyone in the place was loaded to the gills. With his new wife seated to his left and only a slight damper to his drinking, the Navigator thought of those nearby eels and faraway Chinese poets. There was poetry all about them, for the bartender had slipped an old LP on the portable phonograph and the several locals who took up the majority of the eight stools were soon chanting the verses of Robert Service. A crumpled old logger in red checkered wool boomed out every chorus, drowning the voice of the unknown English actor on the record, whose baritone tried desperately to approach a foghorn's pitch.

The Navigator and his wife exchanged knowing glances. They felt like anthropologists who had stumbled into a jungle clearing and were sudden witnesses to an ancient oral ritual. The small pauses between poems were scenes of furious gulping. The bartender was content to sit with his cigar and watch the spinning record. His lips moved with the words but he emitted no sound. He was obviously a relative newcomer, still learning the lines.

The silence following the end of the record was not pierced or torn by any cry of thirst. For a full five minutes there was a feeling around the bar that approached mutual tenderness. The only sound during this silent communion was the nylon crackle of the windsock on the tall pole outside the door.

The spell was broken by the old man who ordered one all around before he lowered his brow upon the bar.

The Navigator tipped his cap in thanks to the dozing figure.

"Amen," said the bartender and set them up, pouring one for himself. "Well," he said cheerfully, "Here's to the last of the commercial hunters. . . ."

The eels slithered out of the Navigator's head. He had never really thought of himself as a commercial hunter before. They were hardly up the ladder of modern civilization. First there were root and grub men, then the seed gatherers, then the cultivators, and, finally, the Industrial Revolution. The idea sat in his head in bold type like the lead sentence in a sixth grade social studies book. He couldn't shake it loose; the notion had become fossilized in the clay bank of his past, sleeping securely along with thousands of useless and bland half-truths. He tried to elevate his thinking by drinking a silent toast to that long disappeared breed of roving whalers, who drank from the sockets of their harpoons. His own aluminum beer can did not have the heft to feed this idea for long, and he soon had himself convinced that Melville's Shakespearean flair was not a true reflection of a deep water man. He felt a slight distrust toward the bartender for leading him thus, he smelled out another graduate refugee, even though the aproned fellow was ten years past him. The man should be old enough to know better.

"Eight of us winter here," the bartender said, sprightly, as if to regain the Navigator's confidence.

"One for each stool," said the Navigator's wife, exhibiting her Quaker common sense. She was drinking a daiquiri in this wilderness. The Navigator could see by her flush that she was not prepared for the amount of rum in that slushy concoction. But the barman had obliged her request and, not prepared for daiquiris, crushed the ice by wrapping it in his towel and banging with a ball peen hammer.

The man winked. "The Point Baker Population Determinizer."

"It's a cozy spot," the Navigator said agreeably.

"We were five weeks between supply boats in January." He nodded to the bar's red checkered benefactor. "Flea here got a couple of deer to tide us over. Opal had a barrel of fish she passed around."

A heavy set woman with short hair and turquoise sweatshirt smiled from the other side of the sleeper. "He sold whiskey at cost."

"That fish was awful salty, we had to do something. . . ."

"The whole bay got salted down after eatin' her fish," said Flea, making a face.

She swiveled full face to the old protestor. "He's just sore because I caught more fish than he did last season, that and the fact that he's been trying to get me in that skiff of his for years. It's all sour grapes."

"There's only one sour grape around here," said the old man.

She puckered. Her eyes seemed to retreat with the insult.

"Awgh! Little Miss Muffet . . . tell them about New Year's Eve."

The bartender interrupted. "Flea, take it easy, we don't need any trouble tonight. I'm getting tired of pulling you out by your ears." He turned to the Navigator. "I've figured out that I've tossed him out of here more than a thousand times."

"She spent the night at my place," Flea explained.

"What do you mean!" she countered. "You were passed

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out. You couldn't remember anything anyway!"

"That's what you think." He laughed at her irritation. "It's a natural fact, Opal, that you can only hold back for so long."

"You're wishing, Flea; nothing happened that night. I just went up to your place to see if you got home all right." She swung away from him and lit a cigarette.

"They've been going at it for years," said the bartender.

Flea brightened. "A spruce fell on her old man a few years back. Frank was my best friend. And my old Sophie was her bosom pal. Now they're both gone and we're what's left, two, t-w-o, and that's just enough to dance."

"You're telling it all wrong, Flea. What about that night Jack found you stuck in the bilge? Truth is," she said, turning to the Navigator and his wife, "that night he proposed and I turned him down. If I'd known he was going to try and freeze himself to death I might have reconsidered."

"He woke up in the channel," said the bartender. "He was screaming bloody murder. 'I'm stuck,' he was yelling and woke up the whole bay. I rowed out and towed him in. He had passed out in the bottom of his skiff and the ice cemented him in. We had to pour hot water in there to get him loose. Opal must have hurt his feelings pretty bad."

"Feelings?" snorted Opal. "Flea? . . . Feelings? That's a good one. If he had any feelings he would have died a long time ago and saved us all a lot of pain." She bit her lip, suddenly sorry for what she had said.

"You old battle axe!"

"Oh, hell, you know I didn't mean it. You see, people, what Opal is up against?"

Flea rubbed a little more red into his eyes. "You women, honest to God, thinking old Flea tried to kill himself over you. That's a *real* good one, dearie. Poor old Sophie knew better than that."

"Don't you say anything about her or I'll belt you one and carry you home by your nose. She was too good for you and if she knew how you took up with the bottle after she departed, she'd never forgive you."

"Yep, when your wife dies, there's nothing left," Flea mused, cocking his head for sympathy. "Know what I mean? You're half gone."

"She's been dead for over ten years, Flea," Opal warned, trying to head off his maudlin turn.

"I was sixty-four."

"Well, I'm not near sixty yet, so you see . . ." she paused and waved her hand back and forth, bringing the fingers to rest below her throat as if she were holding a bamboo fan. ". . . the tremendous difference between our ages."

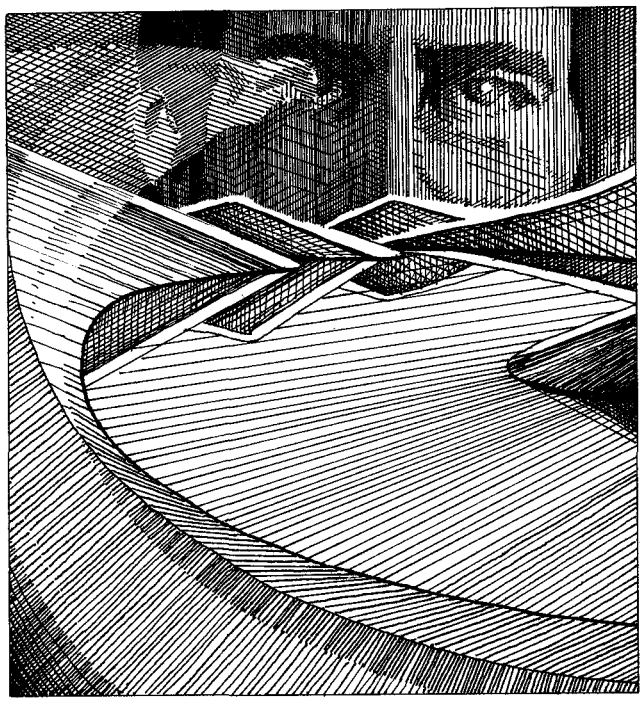
"Hasn't seemed to bother you till now."

"Flea! Not before strangers."

"These aren't strangers," he protested. "These kids fish for a living. I saw them come in a nice little troller. Ain't that right?"

"Right," said the Navigator. "But the bank owns most of it."

"I'll tell you something about bankers, son. They are the enemy to us working guys, those goddamn percentage buzzards. We fought them all, the bankers, the owners, the goons, they all had a piece of our hide. We fought for the eight hour day! I bet you kids can't understand that."



"1916," explained the bartender, pouring a quick shot in Flea's glass with a sigh of hopelessness.

"November 5th, 1916!" Flea corrected. He lubricated his story with a wet, clogged noise from his throat. A bright thread of saliva hung from his chin whiskers. Bubbles danced below his lips. "We've had over sixty years to understand the *situation*. They called us Bolsheviks for wanting a little time with our families." A wave of purple edged across his cheeks, zeroing in on that splotch of cartilage he used for a snorkel.

"Wolf! Wolf!" he cried and laughed with a heave of his chest. "That's what everybody was screaming in those days. They were scared shitless of us. The punks running around nowadays don't hold a candle. The bankers were shooting us down over the eight hour day, a decent wage, a little safety in the woods, anything that cost them profits. Now they fiddleyfuck around over retirement benefits, the unions are as bad as the bosses, they're all in the same league now, that's what progress really is, that's what we got shot for, to be sold down the river and paid off with a miserable little social security."

He reared back and let loose an ungrateful snort at history.

"Know how we got that eight hour day?" he asked his glass. "You got to stop that old Wheel of Progress, don't ya know! And to stop that old Wheel, you have to yank out the spokes. . . ." His arms embraced the stale air and he tottered. "WE ARE THE SPOKES," he boomed. "Farmers, fishermen and loggers, the three big spokes of the Wheel. When you pull out the spokes you got a . . . a *general strike!*"

He smiled across the bar, wiped his chin with the back of his hand. ". . .And we got shot for that," he said quietly.

He lifted his leg up on the empty stool next to him. "Look at this." He pulled up his pantleg. Above his shin, he traced an old scar with his finger. It was a time machine

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back to 1916, securely attached to Flea's leg. The light touch of a finger was enough to carry him back.

"That's where it went in . . . they shot us down in the streets, the company goons and the Everett cops. The guy next to me took his in the gut and didn't even have time to say goodbye."

A tear rolled down his cheek.

"Not many of us Wobblies left, you know."

The bartender laughed. "You keep reminding us, Flea. You turned this place into the floating chapter of the I.W.W."

"It didn't work. They outlasted us, the sonsofbitches. Give me one for that guy who didn't have time to say goodbye."

"That'll be you if you get any ornerier," Opal said. "We all know what happens when you get worked up."

"You're 86'd, Flea."

"My ass!" Flea reached over the bar for a bottle, fell off his stool.

The bartender came around from the back. "How come you always do what's expected of you?"

"He has no choice," Opal said bitterly.

The Navigator and the bartender helped the old Wobbly to his feet. "I want another drink!"

"You've had enough."

"You're right, you bastards, enough, all right. I've had enough of all of you." He lurched toward the Navigator's wife. "They follow me up to the can to make sure I don't break my leg on the way. That's what the hell we got shot for, nobody tells me when I've had enough." His voice trailed off in a slur of curses.

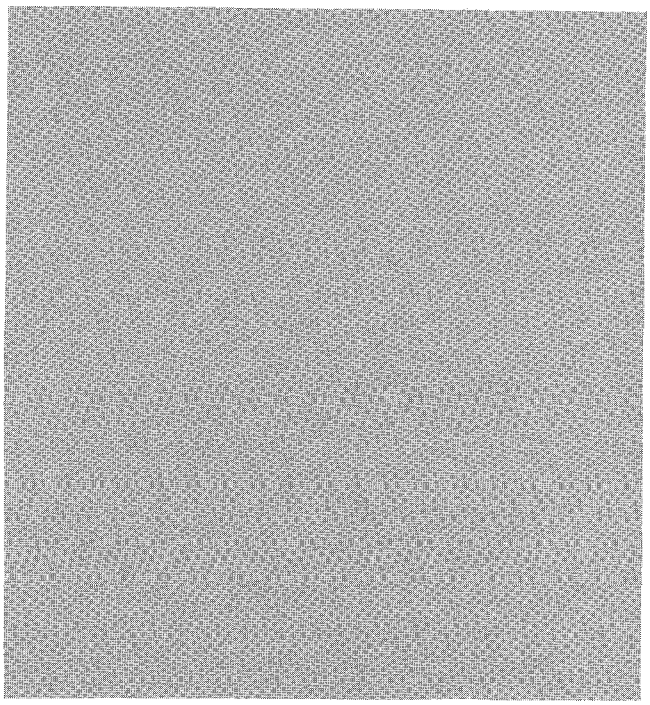
The bartender led him out the door. Opal shook her head. "He's a damn terror for such an old bag of wind," she said with admiration.

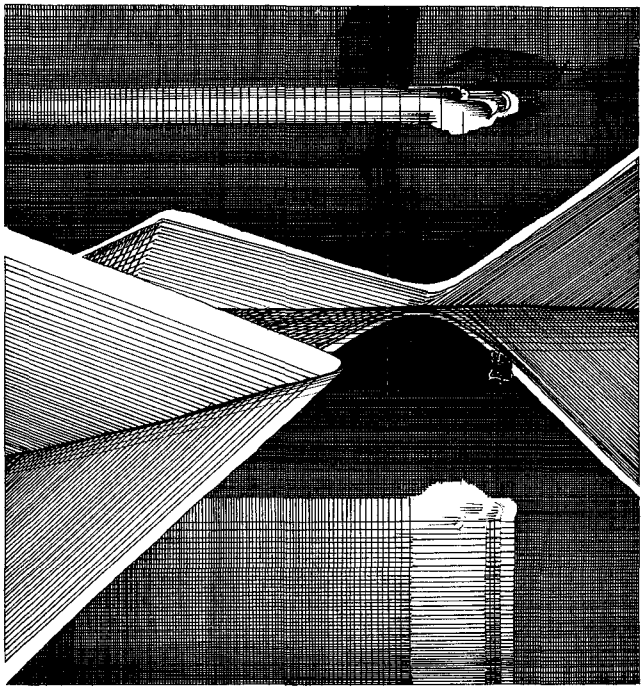
There was a thump against the wall and the door flew open. Flea landed a soft punch to the bartender's shoulder. The force of his swing made him slip backwards and the barman soon had him picked up and gasping for air. Their steps were hollow down the dock.

"It's getting harder to keep him from hurting himself," Opal said.

The Navigator's wife was by the window, watching the three-legged race down to Flea's skiff. "Is it safe to leave him in the boat like that?"

"Jack will stay down there until Flea passes out. Don't worry, that's quite a trick of his. He'll be snoring up a storm in no time with his chin nailed to his chest. . . . I used to worry about it, too. I'd be a dumb fool and walk down there and try to shame him into going home. I'd ask him what he was up to and he would just kind of wake up and eye me a little and say as gently as you please, 'I am studying the tide.' If the tide isn't with him when he leaves here, he just waits for it. When the flood begins he wakes up enough to untie and push away. In a few seconds he's out again but the current carries him up the bay to the big eddy at the rock in front of his cabin and circles him right in to the beach. When his keel hits bottom, it's like a hand on his shoulder. He wakes up and he knows he's home." □





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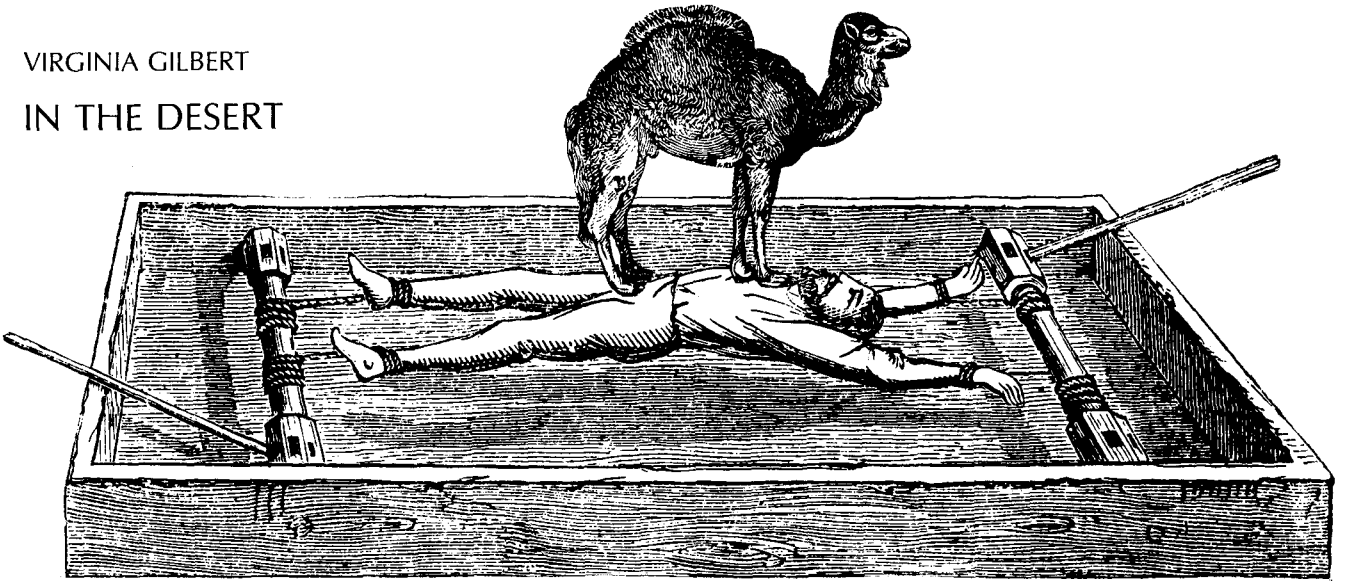
VIRGINIA GILBERT

IN THE DESERT



I

Walking in the desert,
I entered a low cloud,
I entered the side of a cliff.
My body opened
into fossils. My body
hardened into crystal.
The weather longed
for change. When a gully
split along my spine,
the animals, dying of heat,
entered me. I long to be
the cave of winter. Somwehere,
on the shelf
of the Mediterranean,
treasures drift,
compacted in seaweed,
the slow dance back, back
and forth.

II

This is the second part. Around
the Mulberry bush, I asked
many questions but I did not
know the language. People
handed me papers. Someone
sat me down beneath
the river. He said, "Look,
you need trouble, you need
rocks, inlaid pottery,
a German complexion." I felt
the water come over me, then.
I was the dam, a beaver's nest.
the perpetual fall
into mountains,
always disappearing.

III

When my mother died,
I was in the army.
I was writing poetry.
We lived in a tent. We had
no water. We had no indoor
plumbing. I slept on a
wooden bench. Tell me,
what is the marrow
of your complexion so that
I can write it down.
I wear my clothing
in the evening,
when I am waking.

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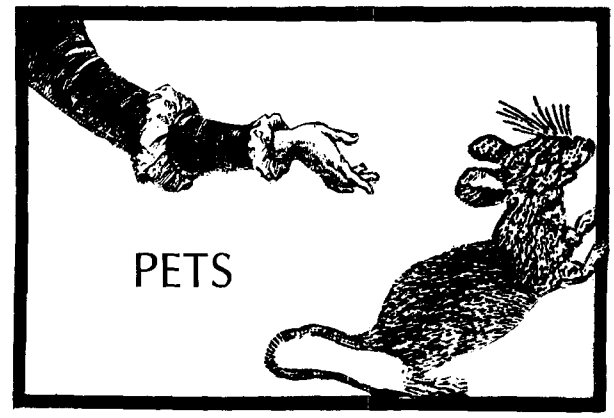
CHRISTINE LEHNER spent much of the year in Latin America, "climbing over Mayan ruins" and studying Spanish language and literature.



A STORY BY CHRISTINE REINE LEHNER

Sheldon lived alone in New York City. She spent hours sitting in her grandmother's French wing chair. The upholstery was shredding where she rested her bony elbows. She listened to piano and organ music. She liked violent, emotional recordings. In what seemed the distant past, when she had gone to school, she had been a serious literature student. Now she thumbed through French magazines, gazed seriously at the fashion pictures. She wanted to mock herself, but she didn't know how. She smoked hashish daily from a Chinese lacquer pipe. She considered herself an upper-class hash addict: she only smoked alone.

Her brother Arnold had said (It had crushed her for she had truly loved him.), "Shel, you make me laugh: so full of strange ideas that you can't tell us about. What do you do all day? Take drugs or something?" And Sheldon would smile, that wide, creeping smile that had taken in the family for years, made them think that some artistic scheme was hatching in her mind, made them hope that they would soon be the relatives of a blossoming young artist. Would she disappoint them? She was not trying to. If it looked that way? She couldn't help it if they were deceived by appearances.

To get back to this winning smile of Sheldon's: it was drug-induced. Her hash habit was something she had built up slowly over the years: a secret vice. The purchasing of sufficient hashish was well within her means. In fact, she needed very little. Sheldon's life was uncomplicated. Her little routines were the substance of her days. She lived alone in a four room apartment. She had six white mice in a cage in one of the rooms—their room. Green, grasping plants proliferated over the apartment: creeping charlies, wandering jews, spiderplants and ivy. She loved the ivy and longed for the day when it would assert itself and start covering the whitewashed walls up to the rotting oak beams.

Sheldon looked after the mice and watered the plants. She kept house and fed herself. She only went out to visit museums and galleries, on early weekday mornings, hoping to diminish her chances of running into acquaintances. At home, she read her magazines faithfully and then cut them up and made collages. Cutting had always been one of her favorite pastimes. She would cut out the most delicate design with infinite patience. As a child, she had drawn and cut out enormous wardrobes for her paper dolls, and then never played with them. There was a certain contentment in her lonely life. That was enough for her. She felt safe with the absence of passion in her life. Only sometimes, sitting in a downtown cafeteria, she would begin to doubt the reality of her day to day existence; there would be a moment of panic as she looked through the smudged glass to the rushing people in the streets and saw nothing she could recognize. In her heart, she knew that she was separate from all of them and that her contentment, her grin, was hers alone. That had to be enough.

Sheldon's mice were the solace and entertainment of her days. She had some idea that they were brilliant mice, and this made her feel good because she thought it must be due to her influence. She read modern fiction to them that she found in the magazines she loved so much, and they understood it remarkably well. Lettuce and Endive, both prematurely greying, had indicated that they preferred Joyce Carol Oates to Sylvia Townsend Warner. Although Sheldon did not agree with this judgment, she respected their right to have opinions. In no way did she discriminate against her mice. The mice' appreciation for Motherwell and Tworkoff was another thing that left her in the cold. Edward Hopper was as modern as her understanding permitted. But she was open minded. It was so easy. She was always bringing back prints and articles for the mice to look over. Every week or so they all read Harold Rosenberg together.

The crucial thing was the hash experiments with the mice. Sheldon had tried blowing masses of smoke into their cage, but that seemed without effect. Now occasionally she introduced small amounts of crushed hashish into their evening meal, usually at their request. They would become restless and animated, and she would let them run free about the room. She had worried about how the drug would affect their health, but as far as she could observe it was not impaired in the least. As a matter of fact, their appetites increased twofold. They developed a craving for sweets. Sheldon thought that too many candies would rot their teeth. But at their insistence, she gave them one sugar cube each, every time they got high. Lettuce and Endive and Radish loved to have races about the room, crossing three times, and then climbing up Sheldon's armchair and ending up on her head, triumphantly ascending her messy brown curls. Red Wagon never got involved in these races because he had a problem with his left hind leg and always lagged way behind. He preferred to be a dignified spectator. Hyacinth and Hydrangea were the only ladies in the group, so they put on their party hats and watched, tittering, from the sidelines. They felt it was essential to maintain their feminine superiority and poise. Hyacinth and Hydrangea enjoyed the hash as much as the boys, they were just more sedate about it. They enjoyed the drug in subtle ways. For one thing, it gave them an excuse to put on their party

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clothes: shimmering chiffon aprons and wide-brimmed straw hats with colored ribbon and fruits hanging off them. They were very nice and admired each other.

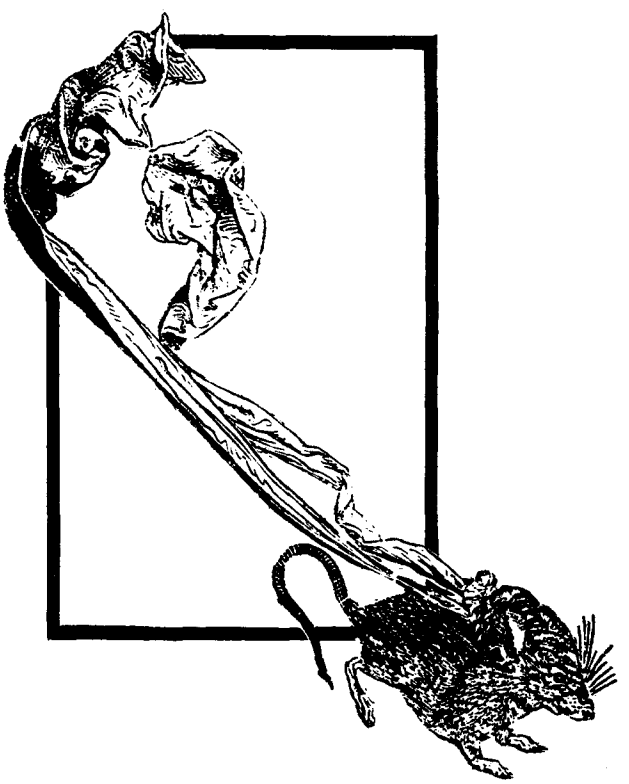
Hy and Hy thought seriously about their position as social trend-setters for the group. They had read about Women's Liberation, but considered themselves to be beyond liberation. The problems of working class women certainly had no relation to them. They saw Sheldon, who was also unconcerned with the movement, and that strengthened their belief that it was not something they should worry about. They of course believed in the intrinsic superiority of women because they were sensitive and delicate creatures, and men were really such sex-oriented brutes. That was implicitly understood by the two lady mice and Sheldon. Sheldon gave them birth control pills, scaled down to mouse-size, and they were eternally grateful for this boon to their lot. They had known mothers and aunts who had sometimes produced five or six litters a year, and wasn't that an outrage to the whole species, propagating like that!

All the mice considered themselves blessed with artistic natures; one of their favorite games was called foot-painting. They dipped their little feet in bowls of tempera paints and then scampered across the newsprint pages, illustrating their vision of mouse-life. Red Wagon generally took charge of this operation. He stood on a small chair and gave directions to the others, to run here and there. Then he did the complicated parts himself. He had to be careful, because of the way his leg dragged. But when he succeeded, it gave him the added sense of accomplishment he needed. Sheldon had tacked up all the good paintings on the wall, so that their room was a real museum of mouse-art. The only thing they longed for was a public exhibition, including both people and mice, but Sheldon felt obliged to squelch this idea. They could never give it up though. Sometimes, when they noticed that Sheldon was getting sentimental over them, they would bring up the subject, and plead with her again. And Sheldon knew that there was no reason why her talented mice shouldn't have a showing as well as Jasper Johns or the Women's Collective or any aspiring art student. She also understood the reality of things enough to know that to suggest such a thing would bring the Bellevue attendants to her front door. She patiently explained to the mice that this was the last thing that any of them wanted. The mice didn't want to believe her; they couldn't help thinking that she was trying to keep them from getting their just rewards. They knew how much she loved them but they thought she might be a little bit jealous of their talents. The mice had agreed among themselves that Sheldon's sketches were not as good as theirs. But they weren't about to force the issue. They realized how lucky they were to have Sheldon at all. As far as they knew, they were the only mice in the world who took hash regularly, a singular distinction which they valued.

Sheldon also had minor complaints about some of the inconsiderate behavior of the mice. For example, they persisted in nibbling off the leaves of her ivy whenever they were out of the cage. No amount of remonstrance would convince them that a plant was a living thing like themselves and did not like to be nibbled at by its neighbors. The mice regarded the greenery as another form of salad to be devoured and enjoyed; they did not go for the "plants have souls too" theory at all. The ladies occasionally took a bite off the spiderplant, for they believed it made their fur soft and bushy. Sheldon tried to tell them it was an old wives' tale. They told her that there were certain mouse-secrets, generations old, that people could never comprehend. Sheldon was annoyed by this condescending attitude.

Sheldon's brother, Arnold, was a successful businessman in the city. He came to see her once every week or so, to check up on her for the family, and also because he liked her. It was relaxing for him to be with her in her eccentric surroundings. She had shown him the mice, and talked to them in the silly way people talk to their dumb animals. Arnold saw nothing unusual in that. He liked Sheldon's plants, but found the profusion just a bit sticky. She always gave him cookies and milk, and then left him alone in the kitchen for a minute while she went to give the mice their portion.

One day in the spring or fall—Sheldon had noticed the weather was balmy—Arnold was upset when he came to see her. It was a Friday evening. Normally, he should have been hurrying home to his wife so that they could go up to their house in the country. But this Sunday was Gram's birthday, and they would have to drive all the way up to the Lake where the old matriarch was firmly ensconced. Arnold was worried that he wouldn't be able to convince Sheldon to come with him Sunday to the Lake. Their parents had asked him to get her there—somehow—as a concession to family solidarity. Because although they hated to say it or even think it, it was not expected that Gram would see another birthday. And it was hoped by her parents that Sheldon would reinstate herself in the good graces of the greater family, the aunts, uncles and cousins who regarded her as a lost soul. Not that any of them knew she took drugs (that would be the crowning blow); they didn't even suspect it. They just



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knew that it was impossible for them to talk with her, and that as far as they could tell, she did absolutely nothing with her life. She wasn't even loose or wild—she was nothing; and how could one explain that away?

On that Friday evening, Arnold thought there was no hope of convincing Sheldon to attend the function. She had never agreed to waste her time in that fashion before, why should she start now? Arnold certainly had no eagerness for the event; they both knew how morbid and dull it would be. But Arnold was a determined man and he had to try. Sheldon sat opposite him at the kitchen table, breaking her cookie into quarters and then dropping it into her milk. She let it soak until it was soft enough to drink all mushy from the glass.

"Hey Shel, how about coming up to the Lake with us this week-end?" He was smiling pathetically, rallying himself to the task. "It ought to be fun. It's Gram's seventy-ninth, you know. They'd all love to see you."

Sheldon's reaction was surprising. She was glad to hear of her family's interest. Maybe she should try general communication again. "I think I'd like to go. That would really blow their minds to see me." Arnold nodded. Sheldon continued, "Do you think I could bring the mice? It'd be good for them to get to the country for a change."

"The mice? Gram and Aunt Maude are terrified of mice; they'd have heart failure on the spot."

"They bring their idiotic pets, don't they? Don't you think that's some kind of pet discrimination? How do you think I feel about a drooling, farting bulldog?"

Arnold nodded in a beaten way. It was all true. He didn't relish the occasion either. Then why was he going? he asked himself. Because he was older, responsible, a functioning member of society with all its obligations, he was the future head of the family: all this his heavy load. It made him feel so crazy that he felt like going in and talking with the mice a while. Sheldon seemed so much better off than him, yet people said terrible things about her and heaped praise upon him. Sheldon obviously didn't care about that particular inequity of things.

She had loved Arnold unreservedly for the first fifteen years of her life. She followed him everywhere, his constant tag-along little sister, doing whatever he bade, taking up all his causes and espousing them vehemently to the parents. She was so extreme in what other little sisters did only as a matter of course, that Arnold was always a little in awe of her worship. He began to be careful with her, the way one is with the mentally retarded. Now, they maintained the pretense of an ordinary relationship; but there was still the undercurrent of all that had passed.

"The thing is, Shel, you'd be doing me a big favor if you came, mice or not. There's something that I have trouble talking about, that Grace and I don't get along any more. I could stand it a lot better if you were there on Sunday."

Sheldon could see that he was keeping himself from becoming very upset. "How could I help? Grace and I don't even like each other."

"I need you. And it might take some of the pressure off me if you were there."

Sheldon smiled. "I see. A diversion for their glaring eyes and piercing questions." Arnold nodded his head slowly. He liked her sense of humor, although it made him nervous. She continued, "But what about you and Grace in the long run? How can we help that?"

Arnold hesitated. "There's not going to be any long run. We're going to get a divorce, and I have to tell the family on Sunday."

"A divorce!" She didn't mean to sound so shocked.

"Come on, it's not the end of the world. It's the only thing we can do before we kill each other."

Sheldon was startled to hear him speak so strongly, and to herself, possibly the least reasonable of all the people he knew. "Arnie! You sound so violent. You never used to talk like that. I'm sorry you're so bummed out."

"I'm not that bummed out, I guess." Arnold sat up and rubbed his eyes. "God, I'm sorry about the melodrama. Anyway, will you come to the Lake with us? Grace and I are going to drive up Sunday morning."

Sheldon closed her eyes. The outcome of their interview seemed inevitable. She wondered, Is this the time to feel trapped? "Why does Grace have to come? Isn't that sort of salting the wound?"

Her brother looked desperate. "We both have to talk to the 'rents. They'd be offended otherwise—you know that."

"Oh I'll come. If you want me to. Aren't I in too much disgrace to be any help?"

"Don't worry. It'll be o.k. I really am glad you're coming, Shel." He spoke quickly, as if to settle the thing before Sheldon could change her mind.

"What about the mice, though? I sure wish I could bring them."

Arnold could sense the obstacles ahead. "Shelley, you know that'll mean trouble." He said in a conciliatory tone: "The family won't understand that sort of thing."

Sheldon wanted to say, What is *that* sort of thing? Thinking of the family made her want to laugh. She knew her mice better than her relatives. She said, "Oh I can leave them for one day."

"I'm so relieved, Shel. Thanks a lot."

She smiled. "Think nothing of it."

That night Sheldon told the mice that she was going to see her family on Sunday. She smoked a bowl of hash while they munched on hash-laced granola. They took the news in stride. She said that they would do hash together again on

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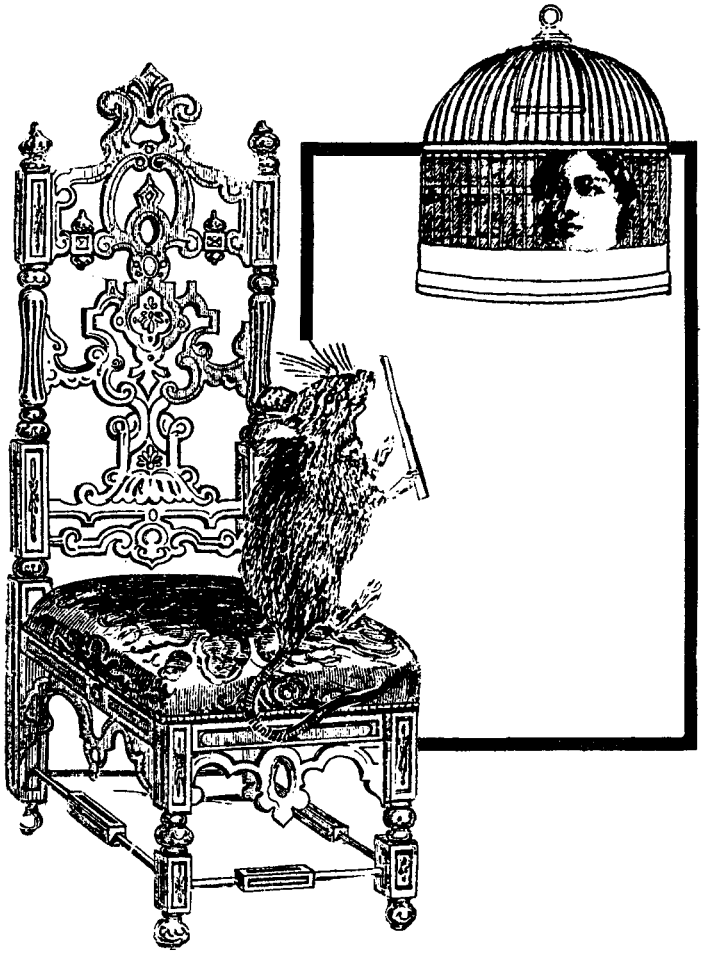
Sunday night. They wondered what the big deal was about. They had been left alone during the day before; it wasn't as if she was going to leave them for the night.

Then Sheldon told the mice about a new gallery showing she had been to that week. The exhibit consisted of structures of chicken wire, cotton waste and resin, hanging in strips from the ceiling. Each piece had a title like, "My Mother Hated Me, Did Yours?" Sheldon said she was baffled and thought it was a hype, and she asked the mice what they thought. There was not general agreement among the mice. Endive and Red Wagon both thought that maybe Sheldon was a bit too stuffy, and that she was always expecting art to stay within certain forms and fulfill ancient expectations. Lettuce wouldn't go that far because he hadn't seen the exhibit and it really did sound pretty bad, even if the concept was valid. What concept? asked the girls. Endive observed that all the girls always stuck together and didn't that just prove. . . . What? Then they noticed that Sheldon looked upset, and they began to tell her nice things, and do a few acrobatic tricks and rub their soft fur against her ankles.

"I'm glad you guys seem to understand," said Sheldon. "This Sunday will be a drag. Those relatives are going to make me feel like a rat." The mice all tittered a bit. Sheldon grinned. "I'm sorry Mom and Dad are bummed out at me. I'm not a success. I'm not even trying to be one. They must regret the day they set up my irrevocable Trust Fund. They think that's the reason I don't grind the daily axe. But that's not it at all.



The mice told her she was crazy to worry so much: her parents would be so glad to see her that they probably wouldn't say anything at all. The mice tried to make her feel she really was doing something worthwhile: after all, weren't they worth anything? Sheldon nodded. She carefully put the mice back in their cage and shut the light. Then she crawled between her own chilly, white sheets and lay awake for hours, trying to conceive of something she would like to do in life besides what she was doing.

Sunday morning Arnold and Grace came by to pick up Sheldon. Grace was polite but distant. Sheldon was almost sure she had shut the mice' cage door tightly. When she went back to say good-bye to the mice a third time, Arnold and Grace exchanged looks, but today they were not saying anything. Sheldon watched the New York State Thruway race past her window; Arnold was driving with a vengeance. He and Grace were obviously not speaking. As they neared the turn-off, Arnold said: "Aunt Ruth is very curious to see you, after your 'months of solitude.' I hope you don't disappoint her, Shel. Make your hair look a little wilder."

"No, not that," she said abstractedly. Then: "Why are all our relatives so old? Not all families are like that. You and I seem to be the only members of the younger generation, Arnie."

"They'll elect me an honorary old folk soon, if I keep at it." He held the steering wheel more fiercely.

Sheldon leaned back onto the midnight blue cushions of the back seat. She did not relish the day before her. Her mother would be solicitous, breaking her back not to say a word in reproach, mentioning jobs or trips that her parents would be glad to create for her. They were too kind. Their extreme kindness made Sheldon feel cynical, which was the thing that frightened her parents the most. Sheldon's father would hug her and pull at her hair. He would ask after her mice, with a funny leer on his face, as if he suspected her of eating them in stew. Then there would be nothing more to say. Not that he ever spoke to anyone. Sheldon thought about how they would become so morbid over the news of Arnold's divorce. It would be a big thing in their lives for months to come. Arnold would have to put up with it.

Sheldon's grandmother was determined to live on and tyrannize generations more. Sheldon was her youngest grandchild and so held a special place in the hierarchy, not that she ever knew what it was. She bullied Sheldon, and Sheldon smiled, picking the cake crumbs from her sweater. The old witch made it impossible for Sheldon to conceive of ever getting old herself.

Everyone at the party had advice for Sheldon:

"Why don't you go back to school? It would give you something to look forward to."

"I can get you a job with this friend of mine in the Village. He has an Art Factory," suggested Uncle Fred.

"Travel can be so broadening," sighed one aunt.

Sheldon realized that her position was indefensible and untenable; but she did not care for arguments or argumentative uncles. Sheldon thought of the mice and the pleasantness of their life together. She wished Arnold would mediate for her.

Arnold had told his parents the news in simple sentences; they had passed the word around, then reacted. Ar-

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nold's mother, grandmother and two aunts were reduced to tears. Uncle Fred had been eyeing Grace lecherously ever since the news had been delivered. Arnold's father was secretly pleased because he had always thought Grace was a bitch. Sheldon couldn't wait to return to the growing quiet of her hanging gardens.

The ride home was as quiet as the trip up. But the tension was exhausted. Another spiritual bond had gone the way of all flesh. Arnold dropped Sheldon off at her apartment building. She kissed his pale face: it looked so sad. She said goodbye to Grace. The chocolatey front of her brownstone rose before her, reminding her of the sickly sweet birthday cake, now congealing in her stomach. She took the elevator up, watching herself in the gilt-edged mirror: an ascending capsule. She dug her key out of her bag and turned it in the difficult, crumbling lock. A draught greeted her. She had forgotten to turn on the heat. She hoped the mice had had the sense to crawl under their blankets. She called out, "Home at last, you guys. Be glad you didn't have to go. It was none too pleasant." She went into the mouse-room. It was dark; she had also forgotten to leave the lights on. She pulled the string hanging from the hackneyed chandelier. Her eyes adjusted and she looked into the mouse-cage. It was empty. They were gone. The door of the cage was open. Sheldon was so stunned that she went back to the front door and came in all over again. But again it was wrong, the cage was still deserted. She let out a sob—but no one appeared. Then she wanted to pull herself together. She went from room to room calling out, "Mice! Lettuce, Endive, where are you? If you think this is funny, I don't. Come on. Hyacinth, you must know how worried I am. Please come back to me, wherever you are." There was no response, not even a slight pitter-patter in the walls. Sheldon sat in her armchair and hugged her knees to her chest and rocked slightly back and forth. She felt too dry inside to cry, she could feel her ribs sticking to her back, her whole system a vacuum. Why had they left her, when she needed them so? She knew they would be in control of their lives from now on. She only hoped they wouldn't be ground up by a streetcar before they made their connections.

Sheldon went to bed early, unable to do anything else. She tried to dream of other worlds, but voices of the mice haunted her. She knew the complete nothingness that had been her life. How could something so simple end up as so much nothing? She woke up as the sun beamed onto her face through the blinds. It took her a moment to remember that the mice were gone. She sat in her chair for a while, feet up on the hassock: today she deserved gentle treatment. She would smoke hash 'til lunch. She wondered if her life would have to change now that the mice were gone. Maybe Arnold would come by. Maybe he would live with her now. She would take good care of him. The two of them could take a long vacation—broaden their horizons. Her parents would think it a great plan. Sheldon dialed Arnold's number, then after one ring, hung up. Everything looked sad and grey in the washed-out morning light. She and Arnold would grow old to become that grey, she panicked. One cloud must have shifted: a single ray of sun poked through her blinds. She could almost see her wandering jew arch itself towards the warm light. She thought, How touching, how melodramatic.

Within a month, Sheldon and Arnold were across the Atlantic. They bathed off the Yugoslav coast, walked in the Black Forest and ate herring by the North Sea. They were devoted to each other. □

RON SCHREIBER

ALL THE LITTLE THINGS ARE FINE

you work five days a week out at nine
home by seven fabrics in bright colors
envelop you as you work nearly every evening
we eat together at night we sleep
& when we want to & we're not too tired or too shy
we make love never anymore because it's time

but the gap between my words & your silence feels like a canyon
not one the army engineers would dam for power & recreation
more like the 100-foot gorge behind John's house in Trumansburg
without walls or fences the water's swift there in spring
& summer tourists drive up to look over the edge
there's only one bridge across the falls we cross it together
we stand in the center & peer down into the wild stream

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LARRY LEVIS

THE WITNESS

—For Thomas McAfee

1.

In the first freeze,
when the crystals of ice
begin singing,
the carp will not blink.

His gills open and close,
thoughtless.
He's an eye only,
a witness with a long stare,
a refusal.

And I have sat all night
in a hotel lobby
in Missouri
with still lips
slightly parted,
listening.

Is the snow
a birth?
How can a root
stand itself?
Or the born blind,
do they sing much?

*

I don't know.
Ask the heel
of your mother's shoe,
ask the rain
whose one syllable
becomes the voice
of your father
who stares up
from the couch.

Bend and kiss him.
Is his face
your own,
a shy paralysis
that attends birth?

The trees
he walked under
take him in,
he stops talking
to his father,
he stops talking.
The shadows
on the Sierras
go still,
the clouds
do not move.
He lies there.

Until he is blind
or childlike.

Or until it is 1943
and a woman watches
troops pass and smile
from a train. She turns
back to her stove,
to her stockings drying
on a radiator,
and forgets them,
dead in the long grasses.

*

You sit in a chair
as the days pass.
The cliffs whole tribes
have abandoned
are yours. You think
the unborn grow
younger each second,
you crush a cigarette
under your heel
and walk out
as the unpicked fruit
darkens above you.

No one knows anything.

2.

I woke and ate.
At the end
of the unfinished letter,
I stared at words
no one could have
fathered, until they
grew still and took on
the depth of woods,
the patience of ponds
blackening under
the flat shadows,
all the hearses
of shadows that ride
quietly as glass
placed over the eyelids
of the dead.

So I imagine
a delicate rain
is eating its way,
finally, into
every stranger I know.
And I walk out
into rain,
past the bars
filling with men,
past the palm reader's
and the thrift shop
where someone goes on
quietly polishing,
shining the shoes
of the dead,
until they look
almost like new.

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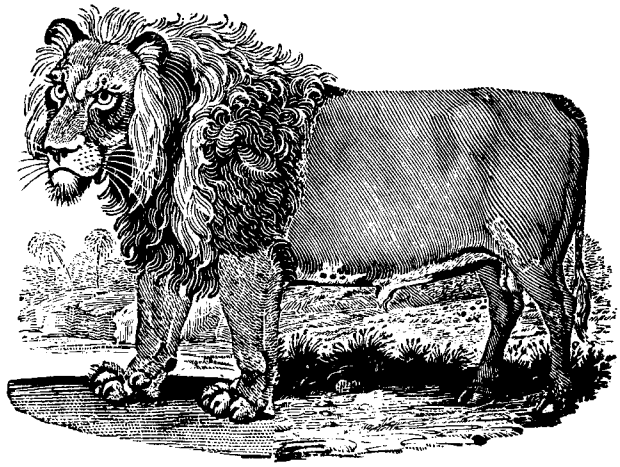

HOW IT HAPPENED

A STORY BY ROBERT RICHARDSON

Once I became the victim of a hard, dark time. For causes which are yet too raw to state, my ties to every good grew tenuous and vexed. Inside my head things went from bad to worse and terror came. For months I lived a textbook case of dread and then, right in the midst of it, I had a dream that eased me in some way beyond its sense. I still don't know that I know what it meant. But here it is:

There were several of them. Some were bearded and some were black. Some were women. A good many were children. They had been looking for a long time without saying exactly what it was they were looking for. All they needed, everyone knew, was a place for it to happen. Late in the summer they came upon two possible places.

The first was a long, low building set in the hollow of a hill, back just a little from the road. Part of it might have been a house sometime. One end of it had certainly been a stable and later an implement shed. But it was empty now and they agreed that it might do.

The other, just a little farther on, was an old mill, two or three stories high and many-windowed. It stood beside the meadow which, through years of silting in, its millpond had become. It was just exactly big enough for everyone. They favored it at once.

"Could it happen here?" He asked Her when they saw it.

"I think it is beginning to," She said.

"Where are we then?" He wanted to know.

"When this place was any place, I believe they called it Skew, North Carolina," Someone replied.

"Oh, I like that," He laughed. "Skew, North Carolina. The mill at Skew. But what about the weather? Are the winters mild?"

"We have been told they are," Another said.

"Then let this be the place where it will be," He said. And so it was.

They dusted it up and put it back somewhat to rights. They made a place for fires and cut some wood but not, because of winter's good repute, too much. They lived in mild communion there and waited for whatever was to come.

One afternoon when some of them were sitting in the big room of the mill, they began to speak of how it felt to know that it would happen.

"It is mostly a feeling of joyful lightness in the chest," Someone remarked.

"Yes, much lighter than laughter even, I have heard," Another said.

"But if you try to hold it in," Someone went on, "or try to act as if it wasn't there, what an aching pressure it can make!"

So, He was about to say, *don't hold it in.* But suddenly He saw that He was several feet above their heads and slowly drifting upward farther still, and He began to laugh. An easy rapture carried Him until He bumped the ceiling and then bounced away, then bumped and bounced and bumped again. This gentle thudding made the others all look up. Then they began to laugh until Someone, much like a bubble in a bottle, rose up and joined Him there.

"How do you do that?" Another cried.

"You come loose immediately as soon as you feel you can," Someone replied.

"But I'm not sure I can make it," Another said.

"You don't feel you can, so of course you can't," Someone said laughing.

"But how do I know how to feel what I have never felt?"

Sometimes, He was about to say, *you know a thing exactly by its lack.* But He saw that Another was already beginning to bob a bit and in a moment he was drifting upward through the air. The others followed all at once and there they wafted gladly until dusk.

ROBERT RICHARDSON is a philosopher now living with his family in Wisconsin.

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Soon afterward the time came for a test. Since everyone could now rise will-lessly at will, articulate the most elaborate of aerial arabesques or hover calmly any place of easeful choice it seemed a bit absurd to think that jumping from some high point, A, to some considerably lower point, B, would amount to very much but there was something about not doing it that might be thought provocative of doubt. A ceremonial proof was planned.

Whether the others felt a little silly as they gathered like a flock of pigeons on the roof, He wasn't sure, but He knew that He did, and as He leapt into the ample air between the roof 's gray shakes and the rocky bed of the old mill run He thought of those derisive stories He had heard of daring boys and borrowed parasols, and then of ancient tyros of this vanished art and worried briefly how His name would sound among those victims of renown who dreamed of leaping past the law that Newton found and then He touched, somewhat incredulous, what seemed to be the pillowed ground. A shout was heard and Someone's voice rose clearly over all the rest.

"It is a sign, a sign. He must be who we thought He was for sure."

He felt His ears grow red, but nothing seemed to happen in between. He tried to think of something He might say, but nothing came. It hardly mattered anyway. A snow of bodies in a flurry of delight fell all around and no one paid Him any farther mind.

Now everyone was more than doubly sure. And while a greater fullness entered into their expectancy, nothing else was changed: the waiting progressed as it had before. Once Someone or Another did think to ask Her if she didn't think they ought to find some way of showing Him some special measure of respect, but when She asked what He could do that everyone could not do just as well, and no one thought of anything, the matter dropped. *Well,* He told Himself when afterward she mentioned it to Him, *that saves another monument and lots of golden railing all around.* He thought of calling them together then to thank them for forgetting it, but saw the inconsistency in this and let the moment pass.

At last Ken came. Everyone—or everyone but Ken at least—had always known he would. From the beginning he had intended to, he said, but there was always some reason why the time was never right. Things were too uncertain where he was for him to leave just then, or events were moving toward some point that would require his close attention and he could not get away. But now, at last, he came.

He came exactly as they knew he would: compelled and unbelieving. He saw at once that everything was wrong: the mill was ugly and too small for anything; it would be cold in winter and they hadn't brought in wood enough; nothing had been done to put the place in shape to work.

No one would listen, though he was eloquent and tried them all.

He left, but in a day or two he came again. This time he rode a dozer and he went to work without a word. He meant to let his actions speak. The meadow would be dredged, the channel to the river opened up. This mill, by God, would run again and grind as fine as it had ever done. That would give them something to show for being there at least.

Nothing but a miracle, they knew, would stop the ruin and the din. They went out into the field and stood before him. He shouted that he would not stop. They would not move, their manner said. So on he came. At thirty yards his tractor slowed. At twenty, though it roared and clattered all the more, it could not move. In frenzy he pulled every lever, jammed the thing in every gear. It coughed and shook and dug itself into the ground and died.

They had to drag him off, his body stiff and numb, his nerveless fingers frozen to the switch that just a moment earlier had made his monster run. They carried him into the mill and laid him down.

It took a week for him to live or die. He used it to the full, with moans and sighs and grimaces of pain. They nursed him carefully and watched.

"He takes it hard," Someone remarked.

"It's hard to die," observed Another.

"Or to be born," She said.

Now I could speak to that, thought Ken. *I've tried it twice. And due to absent innocence the second time is much the worse. The first thing you're alive to is the pain; the second is the knowledge that it lasts; the third is that the choice is yours to let it go or take it up again. Yes, I could speak to that.* He didn't though, because She touched his brow: the fact of knowing it was in Her hands. He roused and smiled and was Himself again.

Now everything but leaving it had happened in this place, and one day this too came. They understood that He would speak before they left. They gathered in the meadow by the mill to wait until He came. No one gave any thought to what He might be moved to say and least of all did He. At ease He rose to speak. He paused as though to let the moment come, then opened up and loosed a mighty bellowing that ripped the hills. The walls of all the nearby barns fell down and showed the doe-eyed cattle feeding there.

"Well, come, my girls, we've work for you to do," He said, and soon the meadow thronged with ample uddered Jerseys, black and tan.

"Mount up. Mount up and let's be gone. There should be one for each of you," He cried. "Be gone."

"You'll have to help me," Someone cried, trying to climb aboard a heavy shouldered beast that looked to be the great grandsire of all. Old greatneck shrugged him off and rolled his eyes and pawed the ground.

He grabbed the old one by the tail and swung him twice about His head and when He set him down he was a roaring lion, maned and horned.

"Now let's be gone," He cried to all again, though everyone had vanished but the three of them. He leapt upon the creature's back, pulled faithful Someone up behind. The lionbull, still roaring his astonishment, refused to move.

Just twist his tail a bit, Someone, He was about to say, but all at once the great one came alive to what it was that he was meant to do, and at a gallop they were gone to catch the Jersey lowing and the laughter and the bells that faded in the distance up ahead. □

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John Lindberg / Jerome Klinkowitz / Thomas Remington

"Black Aesthetic": Minority or Mainstream?

The phrase "black aesthetic" is confusing because it carries numerous meanings. It became a popular slogan during the period of black militance in the '60s, but the militant attitude that it conveys dates to the period of the Harlem Renaissance in the '20s. As a militant slogan the phrase carries the negative rejection of conventional critical assumptions about literature, and carries the positive espousal of the rhetoric of black power. Because of its political base, "black aesthetic" aims at a black audience, and includes the music of blues in its territory as well as literary forms, and indeed, the phrase encompasses anything in black experience that might be considered a cultural expression of a life-style—patterns of speech and dress, the nebulous conception "soul", any practice that distinguishes the black from the white. In practice, the black aesthetic seems to define itself as much by what it rejects as by what it recommends, and insofar as it is a mere rejection of the dominant white culture, it is actually a derivative form of white culture and must be studied in that perspective. But that is not our concern, for this discussion is about literature, and not about politics.

Militant black opinion has brainwashed itself. It has allowed recent political rhetoric to confuse basic aesthetic issues about form and content. It refuses to accept that a writer can be both black and American. It claims, with Hoyt Fuller, that blacks and whites live in "two separate and naturally antagonistic worlds," that: "The black artist in the American society who creates without interjecting a note of anger is creating not as a black man, but as an American," that "to be an American is to lose one's humanity," and that consequently: "The problem of the de-Americanization of black people lies at the heart of the Black Aesthetic." The stress on political awareness and cultural separateness leads to a stress on the content of art to the exclusion of concern for form, because, according to a leading black intellectual, Harold Cruse, American culture is Western, and Western critics are incapable of understanding art from an African tradition.

Such distinctions lead black opinion into simplistic errors. It is an error to separate blacks from American history. In another mood and context the black critic will remind us (quite accurately) of how much blacks have contributed to the development of our country and to the shaping of our institutions. It is an error to identify blacks with an ethnically pure African tradition. Contemporary Africans are quite distinct from American blacks in all cultural essentials. African influence does persist from the past in American black culture, but it requires a specialist to identify it. Whether they like it or not, American blacks have developed their life style in this country. And finally it is an error to separate form and content in artistic criticism. There is no such uniformity among conventional critics as the black militant assumes; more especially, critics do not concur in their conceptions of form and of the importance of form. But however diverse the critical schools, they do consider the role of the imagination in shaping experience into art. This basic consideration is missing from black critical theory. The contempt for symbolism amounts to a form of reverse racism, as though the imagination were an emasculating disability from which black writers are free.

Darwin Turner, editor of recent anthologies of literature by blacks about blacks, has felt the need for a more measured statement about the black aesthetic, but his attempt at a revolutionary rationale shows his assumption in favor of content. When he says that you need to know the culture in order to criticize books about it, he strongly implies that black literature is a special preserve and that only unique experience can authenticate art. Ironically, such a view would seem to regard every work as a private world, a view hard to distinguish from the extreme aestheticism of "art for art's sake." Addison Gayle sees the need for a more communicative theory in saying: "A critical methodology has no relevance to the black community unless it aids men in becoming better than they are." This is moral criticism, and begs the question implied in the term *better* while it also seems to reserve *men* to *the black community*.

Thus in their suspicion of a criticism that they identify with the dominant white culture, black militants have cut themselves off from their potential in artistic expression, and have not supplied a comparable rationale of their own. But two black critics have pointed the way for black writers to contribute their own insights to American culture. Albert Murray warns against confusing politics with culture and accepting shoddy art on propagandistic grounds. And Ralph Ellison, whose *Invisible Man* exemplifies his advice, tells the black writer of his "struggle to stare down the deadly and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world . . . in terms of race."

But before we go on to find the actual aesthetic contribution that blacks have made to American literature, we should pause to recognize an important aesthetic innovation that has grown out of the black artist's increased social awareness. This is an aesthetic of proletarian consumption, throwaway art created for an immediate popular response. The primitive analogue to such art is noted by James T. Stewart, who cites Africans building mud temples raised anew after each rain, and Japanese making prints on cheap paper

"Black Aesthetic" was originally presented to the Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of English, College Section, meeting in October at Penn State.

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to be handed out in the streets. The fragile material marks the importance of immediate communication of a message appealing to a broad popular taste. LeRoi Jones, a gifted creator of such art in the form of street-drama like his *Police*, points the political possibility of this "best kind of literature" as a "direct social response," and Don Lee recommends throwaway literature as serving the sole purpose of inspiring a style and a spirit. Julian Mayfield finds the rationale for such immediate popular appeal in the blacks' need for "a new spiritual quality, or the recapture of an old one," a "search for a deity" to lead a revolution. Ron Karenga eliminates artistic considerations altogether in his call for a literature that is "functional", "collective", and "committing".

Don Lee and Nikki Giovanni come to mind as practitioners of this new folk poetry, writing poems that appeal to emotions of sexuality and of group solidarity, poems that often list repeated activist slogans, poems of overt attack on traditionary enemies. I think one of the best artists in this form, who transcends extremist propaganda, is Ed Bullins, whose plays provide us with substantial works, giving full characterization, authentic diction, and deep compassion for his black characters. There are no heroes. The stage fills with a predicament which the characters do not resolve but rather adapt to their own needs, managing to live in the midst of catastrophe. Such Plays as *Clara's Ol' Man, Goin'-a Buffalo,* and *In the Wine Time* take us directly into black lives in separate parts of the country without preachment and with great power.

Bullins' genius has taken him safely past the limitations implicit within the exclusive requirements of popular activism. But when Larry Neal defines "black aesthetic", he does so with a four-page list of black cultural items ranging from the dozens to the names of distinguished musicians in blues, jazz, and bop; from the Apollo Ballroom to spirituals. He makes no analysis or interrelationships and so he misses the chance to lead us into a fuller grasp of the ways in which black culture has affected American culture at large. Ironically, the black activist LeRoi Jones has put his finger on the black artist's American destiny when he says that the artist is a moralist because he demands "a moral construct of the world" based on an original vision of a clean society. Now of course the word "construct" suggests the function of the imagination, and the vision of a clean society as a backdrop for the imaginative reshaping of reality is a good description of the satiric motive in literature. From an opposite perspective, then, Jones has had the same insight as Ralph Ellison has had: of black minority literature re-directing the American mainstream back to the deep channel cut by Melville, Twain, and Faulkner.

Most black critics who are not outright nay-sayers recur to Ellison's comments on the relation between black and white culture in *Shadow and Act*. Neither an assimilationist nor a black nationalist, Ellison is perhaps the most reliable single guide to the question of the black writer's cultural role. He points out that the white literary tradition repeatedly uses the black man as a universal human symbol of aspiration despite injustice, citing (among others) Melville, Whitman, and

AN EXCHANGE:

To the Editor

This is the first time I have ever protested against a review of one of my books, but I must take issue with Grace O'Neill Hovet's review of my *The American Eve in Fact and Fiction, 1775-1914*, in your summer issue. A reviewer has a right to attack a writer's views but not to distort them. She states, "Some readers will detect an animosity toward women who stepped into the public arena. . . ." On the contrary I felt and expressed great admiration for these women as a group and in particular for Lucretia Mott, Sarah Hale, Elizabeth Stanton, Elizabeth Blackwell, and the Grimke sisters. My phrase in summing them up was "Considering the restrictions on women of the Victorian era, the independence of mind and initiative of nineteenth-century crusaders and Civil War organizers . . . one has a feeling of awe."

Ms. Hovet says that I echo at great length the views of Basil Ransom in James' *The Bostonians*. (I am afraid that I here detect animosity on her part.) The fact is that the whole thrust of my book is a refutation of such views as reflected in nineteenth-century novels.

By picking out my less than flattering portraits of Clara Barton and M. Carey Thomas the reviewer implies that my book is a masculine debunking of notable women. I can say only that I drew my material about these two ladies from feminine biographers.

As to Ms. Hovet's contention that the sexual aspect of women has no place in an account of their achievements, and no relationship to my discussion of novelists, I must point out that one of my strictures on nineteenth-century novelists was that they presented sexless women as contrasted with real human beings.

She is upset by my remark about some crusaders being motivated by neurotic compulsions. I said "persons" not "women." I suspect that even an ardent women's libber, as Ms. Hovet seems to be, would not have objected to such a comment about John Brown or Anthony Comstock, people I mentioned to my feminist copy editor.

I cannot avoid the feeling that your reviewer thinks that no man can do justice to women.

Ernest Earnest
Cape May Point, N.J.

Ms. Hovet responds:

I did not expect that Mr. Earnest would agree with my opinion. Since he asserts an interest in women as "real human beings," however, I am sorry to see that he sex-casts me as a "women's libber" and suggests that I think "no man can do justice to women." Further, he states that I contend that the sexual aspect of women has no place in an account of their achievements. Actually, I openly pose the question of the relevance of women's sexuality to their historical roles and go on to agree with Gerda Lerner's view that psychological judgments about women and their sexual lives must be made *when applicable*. Just as I do not think that my biological nature is central to my function as a critic (despite Mr. Earnest's implications), so I do not think that the sexual lives of many of the historical women he deals with are especially relevant to their roles and contributions. The point I made in my review, and repeat here, is that in addition to a sympathetic and historically informed interest in women, writers need a feminist point of view in books which purport to deal with women as real human beings.

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Twain. Standing as he does for the question of social equality, a character like Daggoo, Queequeg, or Nigger Jim links American literature to the problem of colonialism. Twain, for example, was a fierce critic of our genocidal practice against native Filipinos during and after the Spanish-American War. So it seems natural for Ellison to speak of how the black writer should continue this theme, not as an ethnic preserve but as the pursuit of what he calls "*the* American theme": namely, the search for self-awareness in a society that stifles individual creativity. Ellison would agree with Richard Wright, who claims that in learning how to survive, the American black has lived through all of the American struggle to assert ourselves against bigness and impersonality, but in a threatened subculture and therefore more intensely. The theme is especially important for black writers to pursue, because, with the exception of Faulkner, the absence of black characters in contemporary fiction coincides with the abandonment of moral questioning as a theme or motive. Speaking of himself as an American novelist, Ellison concludes: "Consciousness and conscience are burdens imposed upon us by the American experience. They are the American's agony, but when he tries to live up to their stern demands they become his justification." Again, this imperative finds a parallel statement in LeRoi Jones' demand that black literature separate itself from what is "weak" and "heinous" in American life and "use its very existence as evidence of a more profound America."

If there is such a thing as the "black aesthetic," then, we will find it in our understanding of the paradox that the literature of one of our minorities has become the custodian of themes in danger of disappearing from our literary mainstream. The paradox is not very improbable. Herbert Hill explains how it comes about when he says that the black has always lived on the edge of the American way and so is more aware than most of us are of both the promise and the betrayal in the American way. Even to survive as a self-aware observer, the black artist has had to make a more than usually vigorous imaginative response. Writing in 1897, W.E.B. DuBois speaks poignantly of the "two-ness" of the black writer, both American and Negro, "two warring ideals in one . . . body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." And Saunders Redding, the most distinguished black literary scholar of our age, has made the point that black writers have won a victory against white stereotypes of blacks (19th-century writers), and against commercial exploitation (Harlem Renaissance), to become spokesmen for themselves addressing an unsegregated audience. In support he lists (among others) such major contemporary artists as Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker, Ralph Ellison and William Melvin Kelley. To quote LeRoi Jones again: "The paradox of the Negro experience in America is that it is a separate experience, but inseparable from the complete fabric of American life."

The black writer thus has three problems, according to James Emanuel: he must deal with authentic material, he must develop an indigenous style, and he must avoid reverse apartheid. By authentic material, we mean the native soil of immediate memory, such as we find in William Demby's *Beetlecreek*, and Chester Hime's *Third Generation*, without apologies to any color of audience. An indigenous style attempts to catch the rhythms of actual speech, as Twain echoed dialect differences in *Huckleberry Finn*, to exploit rhythm and diction without descending into comic bathos or withdrawing into an exclusivist patois. Albert Murray in *Train Whistle Guitar* shows great talent at leavening conventional prose with dialectal lilt and asperity. As for avoiding racist hostility, Murray has spoken of our varied ethnic traditions as "the very essence of cultural diversity and national creativity." The new African writers have responded well here with such works as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a novel tracing the disintegrative effect of colonialism on African life. But in American work, we have of course the epochal *Native Son*, by Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison's equally central *Invisible Man*. Whatever else these books may be, they are certainly not segregated: they measure us all by the depth of our unfullfilled promises.

* * *

Following these guides, black literature quickly emerges in the characteristic form of minority literature in any culture. But a culture is an amalgam, and must be defined by its particular traits. Perhaps more so in America than in any other country, the configurations of the national literary genius develop those of a region, or class, or ethnic tradition, or all of them. Consider the work of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, James, Crane, Norris. How can they avoid the label of being written from a local preoccupation and a particular sensibility? They are much more, of course, but they begin with an isolated sensibility struggling against the encroachment of nature and society. Their limited scene deepens their universality. The same is true of work by Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, Mari Sandoz, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor. No one has ever recommended that these writers transcend their limited scope and join the mainstream. So again, a study of black work can refresh our sense of the American literary task.

Albert Murray, in discussing blues as a unique black contribution, reminds us that if we are eager to accept blues as valid art, then we must in all consistency accept a joyous response to life, a cultural daring, among those who create it. Such a dynamics of confrontation is also obvious in the folkloristic origins of much black writing. Ellison writes: "Negro folklore, evolving within a larger culture which regarded it as inferior, was an especially courageous expression." The slaves marked themselves off as different from and superior to their masters in their adaptation of African beast fables to the plantation, where the signifying monkey beards the stupid lion, and where the tar baby by the sheer power of his presence compels the fox to share a common concern with the rabbit. As Ellison himself has demonstrated, surviving folklore has infinite possibilities for the writer. The character of Rhinehart in *Invisible Man* shares provenance with Homer's old man of the sea Proteus, with the picaresque hero of Lazarillo de los Tormes, with Melville's confidence man, with Felix Krull, even with the music man, the rainmaker, the flim-flam man, and Mr. Scratch and the fool-killer.

By now we should recognize that any national literature grows from its particular roots. No one questions that the work of Swift, Sheridan, Burke, Shaw, and Yeats is among the most important in any literature; yet that work bears all the marks of satire, dissent, and cultural revisionism that we commonly associate with minority literature. Here I do not mean to claim equal rank between, say, Burke and Wright, but I do mean to suggest that

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the distinction between minority and mainstream is a dubious one, and that the weight of the comparison can swing either way.

When a black writer considers his place in the mainstream, like any artist he has to find the relevance between his life and his culture. The imagination is the bridge. Ellison returns often to the projection and wish-fulfillment that lead the artist to imagine a place for himself. As a boy, he says, he felt no racist impediment against his fantasies, but dreamed of the same roles as do white boys. "Books," he says, "which seldom, if ever, mentioned Negroes were to release me from whatever 'segregated' idea I might have had of my human possibilities." And he mentions Marx, Freud, Eliot, Pound, Stein, and Hemingway. He names those who influenced him specifically: white critics Stanley Edgar Hyman and Kenneth Burke, music critic Irving Kolodin, black artists Albert Murray and Jimmy Rushing. As Albert Murray himself says: "Many things may be segregated, but great books and great ideas are not." I think of Richard Wright smuggling Dostoevsky out of the Nashville public library under the pretense of fetching books for a white man, an incident near the end of *Black Boy*. Books may be unsegregated; libraries might not. But Wright himself closes *Black Boy* with his decision to leave the South for Chicago, because he needed cultural room to expand his ideas and save himself from his own rage against the whites. For the black to hurt in return for his own hurt would be to lose whatever sense of self he has managed to build. Horace Cayton agrees with Wright, and concludes that the dualism afflicting a black from his youth is no different from the whole society's uncertainty about itself.

The first task for the artist is to recognize himself, so his message is authentic. The black has to decide who he is besides his color, Ellison begins. This recognition puts him on the same imaginative level as any reader, and insures communication rather than preachment. Any writer has to do the same spadework or his work will be jejune—statement, not engagement. Raw experience and claimed suffering in themselves are meaningless to others, and need the perspective of imaginative identification to win the reader. Only symbolic technique can convert the tar baby from a puppet to an expressive mode in its own right. Ellison does not deny the burden of the black's experience of racism, but he wants us to see that in dealing with racism the black struggles with the same identity problem as any artist must face. And because the racist issue is a paradigm of our social ideal, the black is closer to the literary mainstream than those writers black and white who have blunted their satiric edge on despair and outrage.

* * *

Let us speak now of the characteristic traits expressing a black imaginative struggle between self-recognition and the urge for universal meaning. Many traits will be similar to those in any literary work, but Ralph Ellison has noted a few specific black themes. He regards the folkloristic tradition as an important means of self-awareness for any minority: the repeated situation, characters, and motifs, often local versions of world-wide patterns. So he bases *Invisible Man* on the motif of quest and confession, symbolic autobiography. Like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Ellison's character Rhinehart has the polar opposed names "Bliss" and "Proteus," because he is a "personification of chaos," with affinities, as we have seen, to Melville's confidence man and to the trickster as a universal folk-hero. Thus Ellison develops a rich implication out of the black stereotype of the sly shucker and jiver.

All his life, the anonymous hero of *Invisible Man* tries to understand the truth hidden in his bitter grandfather's black-racist advice: "agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open." He finally decides that what this means is that the victim is stronger because he is aware of his own weakness and guilt, while the oppressor is ignorant of his, because nothing has challenged his adequacy. Probably the bitter grandfather would reject this interpretation of his paradox, but that is because he has not imaginatively risen above his experience. But in the hero's acceptance of his invisibility we can see not a supine acquiescence in white-prescribed roles, but the universal symbol of vicarious suffering.

Ellison has created a novel that symbolically expresses the insight of Kierkegaard, that only through resignation to our dilemma can we recognize it and transcend it, "a voice issuing its little wisdom out of the substance of its own inwardness." Thus Ellison's re-

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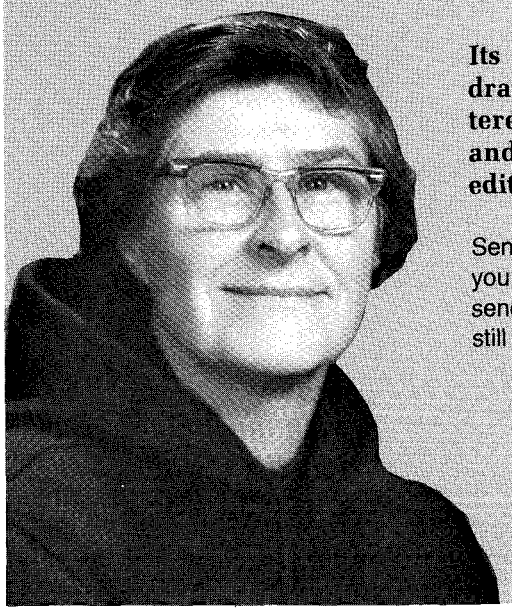

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spect for folklore and symbol has generated a pattern in the novel's repetition of archetypes, a "ritual understructure" balancing the black theme in the literary mainstream.

In many ways, *Invisible Man* is a prototype of characteristic black literary themes. Ellison tells us that his confessional story moves from darkness to light, and from oppression to freedom. The hero moves steadily away from the obscurity of near-slave status as he moves from South to North and as he progressively repudiates institutions that would force him into a role. "Keep this boy running" is the letter of recommendation he carries with him. Like Huck Finn, he comes to himself by shedding protective disguises until he has nothing left but his will to survive, invisible because he sees through the fantasies of those who wish to use him. This archetypal structure, Ellison believes, is more valid for a black novel than is traditional plot and characterization, because from the opening "battle royal" scene, the story shows the hero unconsciously reacting to forms of social control. In fact, says Ellison with uncommon candor, the subliminal patterns based on folklore and ritual archetype will probably keep his novel vital after the explicit black theme has dated.

Ellison's judgment of his own work is the more convincing because the patterns he has built into his novel appear at large in black literature. To give them explicit labels for ease of discussion, we can arrange these patterns in a five-level hierarchy: source, struggle, autobiography, selfhood, fantasy. Such a hierarchy seems to be the motive of Richard Wright's "The Man Who Went to Chicago," in *Eight Men*, the story-essay giving the rationale of the book as the black quest for identity through endurance, mobility, and truth to origins.

The themes form a hierarchy in this way. Source deals with the African origin, slavery, Emancipation, and oppression, as in slave narratives and in Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*. Struggle is a closely related theme, at the next chronological stage, the work of "the talented tenth," and deals with the color line, passing for white, and winning acceptance, as in DuBois's *Souls of Black Folks* and Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Autobiography is an important motif and differs from the struggle theme in being inward, subjective, psychological, exploring the pain and dignity of becoming aware of one's blackness in a white society. Novels with autobiographically derived heroes, and lyrics, as well as ostensible autobiography deal with this theme, like Wright's *Long Dream* and Walker's *For My People*. Selfhood is a more objective and realistic theme, dealing with personality-types and life-styles, and is often satiric with little direct reference to whites. Probably the best single exemplar is Langston Hughes's character Jesse B. Semple, who Hughes has said is inspired by Sancho Panza. Finally, the fantasy theme is the most challenging. It deals with wish-fulfillment, day-dream, and hero-worship, and usually moves quickly into an imaginative world with its own conventions while retaining a naturalistic style. Three striking examples are Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground," Hughes's "On the Road," and Ellison's "King of the Bingo Game." Here also we should locate LeRoi Jones' companion pieces *Dutchman* and *The Slave* and Bullins' *Goin'-a Buffalo*. The fantasy works give symbolic force to revolutionary indignation and are an important black contribution to the literary mainstream, of the same stature and dealing with the same archetypes as found in Faulkner's *Light in August* and Malamud's *The Fixer*.

For a quick review and summary, we can find all of these motifs in *Invisible Man*. Source gives us the embittered grandfather and the still-surviving slave quarters in the opening episodes. Struggle takes us to the battle royal, the scenes in the black college, and the trip North. Autobiography is especially strong in the whore-house brawl, the paint-factory, and the hospital. Selfhood appears in the confrontations with the Brotherhood and with Ras the Destroyer. Fantasy is a local theme in the underground scenes at beginning and end, but the work as a whole is one of the best examples we have of the power of transforming vision to redeem society. With its constantly heightened but always flexible style, it maintains a consistent perspective through all thematic shifts, and is deliberately in the tradition of Melville and Faulkner. In fact, it is only a measure of our own white conceit that we have been unwilling to recognize in Wright and Ellison the next major authors after Hemingway and Faulkner in the American literary mainstream. —*John Lindberg*

THE MILD, MILD WEST

Heading West, it happens every time I hit the Denver airport: a discouraging uniformity, so that whether I'm going on to Arizona or California, Scottsdale or Marin, it's all the same. Like taking the stage into a cowboy town. It's the way Ishmael Reed surprised everybody by describing Berkeley, but I can see now how he's got it right on the nose.

From the first, you're an immediate outsider. But most importantly, an outsider from another, newer age. The country looks old fashioned, the styles deliberately quaint, people dressing like we did in the Midwest ten years ago. And literary tastes are surprisingly of the same vintage.

I was to speak at the Bay area universities on my specialty, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. But there had been rumors that I liked fiction more recent than that ("than *that?*"), and it made for a hackneyed round of introductions. At San Francisco State: Did you bring Ronald Sukenick along in your pocket? And again from a modern lit professor at Berkeley (after no other clue than my last name and a smile): Sukenick, I can't read Sukenick, can't read him at all!

An hour later I heard this man's speech on a pet subject, how through the novels of Bernard Malamud he'd discovered that he wasn't an Irish Catholic like the rest of his Boston friends. The topic came up a few more times during the week, until I sincerely believed the Bay area literati were just discovering *The Assistant* and "Angel Levine." I wasn't far from wrong, since a hot topic was Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, often garnished with the story of Floyd Salas's shout-down of Bellow during a 1966 speech at State. I heard this anecdote four times in two and a half days.

When it came time for talk about new fiction, the subject was Philip Roth. When I asked about writers under forty, somebody mentioned "Mark Mirsky, a nice boy." The speaker couldn't have been more pleased had he known Mirsky's uncle was sending him to Podiatry school.

There was once a San Francisco

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renaissance, I kept telling myself, but concluded that it might be part of this region's deadly pathology. There can be a curious provincial chauvinism that comes from having the Beat Generation grow up in your front yard. As a movement, it was supposed to be the Last Resort, so it's embarrassing having to talk about anything subsequent. So nobody does.

* * *

Secure with its dual gods of Bellow and Ferlinghetti (an odd couple, don't doubt me), I left State for my next date at the University of San Francisco. Here was a terrific contemporary consciousness: Leonard Michaels had spoken the week before, and the audience walked out. A month earlier, Diane Wakoski had been just as dirty, and people walked out on her, too. I quickly changed my speech from The Spectacular Salaciousness of Innovative Fiction to something like "the responsibility of the innovative writer," everyone stayed, and I made my fifty bucks.

For a while, I thought all this Bellow-Malamud-clean literature stuff was due to a culture lag. But the real problem is no culture at all. Sukenick, who's lived in California for five or six years, has talked about it. The problem, he says, "is the relative emptiness of everything. Everything is a blank slate. You can do what you want, you can make up your whole life from scratch if you feel like it, nobody will know the difference. The people are empty. Marvelous! They have no problems, how can you have problems if you're empty?"

The emptiness is scarey, like the vacuity of hovering for hours in front of daytime TV. The towns and suburbs have the same emptiness: Bolinas, Tiburon, Mill Valley, all made up of these little junk stores, where you buy a month's worth of curios and cart them home. Then you sweep out your house, go down to Harry's for a gin fizz, and start the process over again.

The students at my talks were pleasant and clean. They've taken the terrain of 1955-63 as their own turf, and know Roth and Updike and Malamud pretty well. For "new writing" there's Ken Kesey and a good dose of Vonnegut. Along the way, I learned where all my royalties were coming from: *The Vonnegut Statement* was required reading in their California high schools.

A friend teaching at the University of California made the judgment for me: the West is by far the sleepiest area of the country. But for the terminal exception of Hunter S. Thompson, there are no interesting essayists around. Poetry has petrified à la Gregory Corso '59. And the single vibrant novelist—Ishmael Reed—became what he was in New York. The conservative literary judgments I encountered were really refusals to judge at all—like the illiteracy that the UCal professor insisted on confessing to me. Most people working in the universities had been on the Coast about ten years, and some had suspended literary judgments for about that long. So their standards of 1965 became a last line of defense—this was indeed the world when they last knew it. California seems to have been their own Last Resort, the land for an endless Summer. And so the mood stayed that of the week after Labor Day.

Some of his friends, by the way, have told Ronald Sukenick that his tenure in California may have hurt his writing. He doesn't think so, but this Fall he's moving to Boulder, Colorado. I should tell him that there'll be little difference, that it's all the same in the mild, mild West. —*Jerome Klinkowitz*

SF AS STRUCTURAL FABULATION

In a foreward to *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame, 1975), Robert Scholes tells us that his little (xi + 111 pp.) book consists of four Ward-Phillips lectures given at Notre Dame in 1974 which "are intended as a kind of prolegomena to the serious reading of what we loosely call 'science fiction'." Exactly *whom* Scholes' prolegomenon is supposed to introduce to the serious reading of science fiction is left uncertain.

The problem is more than a mere quibble. In Scholes' own words, "Both the first two lectures are general and theoretical in their emphases." The general and theoretical matters which they emphasize are ones that have been devoured, digested, and disposed of by science fiction aficionados. For example, Scholes' first lecture takes as its point of departure "the realistic fallacy." "Because reality cannot be recorded . . . realism is dead. . . . There is no mimesis, only poiesis. No recording. Only constructing." Rejecting both "self-reflective" fiction ("loss of faith attended by abnegation of responsibilities") and "new journalism" ("open solipsism") as alternatives to realistic fiction, Scholes asks, "How can fiction be most useful to mankind in the present and the future?" His answer is—more or less simply—"the most appropriate kind of fiction that can be written in the present and the immediate future is fiction that takes place in future time."

The second essay amplifies on the answer given in the first. The advances of scientific knowledge during the past century and a half have forced man to stop viewing himself as part of an historical process with which he might (or might not) be in harmony. "Now structuralism dominates our thought, with its view of human existence as a random happening in a world which is orderly in its law but without plan or purpose. . . . Man must make his own values, . . . must create his future himself."

Now this is all o.k. stuff. Whether or not one agrees with it, one can see it as reasonable and perceptive. But for anyone who reads science fiction regularly, Scholes' arguments lack contemporaneity. In the same year in which Scholes gave his lectures at Notre Dame, Norman Spinrad edited an anthology, *Modern Science Fiction* (Anchor, 1974); in the introduction, Spinrad wrote:

> Today, after Einstein, Freud, psychedelics, quantum mechanics, McLuhan, cybernetics, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, systems analysis, and a few hundred other little vision-expanders, we're back where we were before the Victorians defined reality as a rigid Tinker Toy construct. We know that a literature which pretends that it is somehow more relevant to the "real world" than speculative fiction because it deals with the "here-and-now" is putting itself on. There is no fixed "here" and no fixed "now," only the continuous kaleidoscopic explosion of the evolving human mind in a total space-time universe that is evolving new realities around us faster than we can catch our breath.

In the same year, in Reginald Bretnor's *Science Fiction: Today and Tomorrow* (Penguin, 1974), Ben Bova wrote: "Science fiction writers are not in the business of predicting *the* future. They do something much more important.

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They try to show the many possible futures that lie open to us. . . . For there is not simply *a* future, a time to come that's preordained and inexorable. Our future is built, bit by bit, minute by minute, by the actions of human beings. One vital role of science fiction is to show what kinds of future might result from certain kinds of human actions."

Neither Bova nor Spinrad makes his argument in the detail that Scholes does. But the reason is simply that both are writing for an audience of science fiction buffs, and to such an audience the substance of the argument is not new, not exciting, and not worthy of that breathlessness Scholes brings to it. "A major didactic function of future-fiction may simply be, as Michael Ryan has suggested, to help us loosen our grip upon the present and accept the future as real," Scholes states in the conclusion of his lecture, and seems merely to echo an idea stated twenty-two years earlier by L. Sprague de Camp in "Imaginative Fiction and Creative Imagination"; science fiction writers "have accustomed the reader to the idea of inevitable change and of a host of possible alternative outcomes to present tendencies" (in *Modern Science Fiction: Its Meaning and Its Future*—Coward-McCann, 1953).

Further dredging up of parallels with Scholes' ideas would have the delicacy of a sledgehammer attack on a butterfly. But it seems necessary to indicate that the theorizing in *Structural Fabulation* is going to seem small-bore to anyone who follows science fiction regularly. Moreover, many devotees of the genre are likely to find themselves exasperated by Scholes' offering of his work as "prolegomena to the *serious* reading" (my italics) of science fiction; one who is familiar with the critical work of such regular science fiction commentators as James Blish (much of whose work appears under the pen name "William Atheling, Jr."), Damon Knight, and Joanna Russ will anticipate Scholes going on to write a prolegomenon for *serious* listening to jazz—let Feather, Gleason, Hentoff, *et al.*, take the hindmost.

But what of the serious reader of contemporary non-realistic non-science-fiction? Perhaps, in aiming at such an audience, Scholes felt it necessary to make the new revelation by tiny increments. Start with what the reader can agree on ("Realism is dead") and work up to the biggie ("Science fiction is the wave of the future"). Maybe. But even for a carefully-selected audience, Scholes' arguments are going to have a bit of tarnish. Consider Eliot Rosewater and Billy Pilgrim:

> It was Rosewater who introduced Billy to science fiction, and in particular to the writings of Kilgore Trout. . . .
>
> Kilgore Trout became Billy's favorite living author, and science fiction became the only sort of tales he could read.
>
> Rosewater was twice as smart as Billy, but he and Billy were dealing with similar crises in similar ways. They had both found life meaningless. . . .
>
> So they were trying to re-invent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help.
>
> Rosewater said an interesting thing to Billy one time about a book that wasn't science fiction. He said that everything there was to know about life was in *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Feodor Dostoevsky. "But that isn't *enough* any more," said Rosewater.

The passage, of course, is from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*. Scholes' first two lectures ("general and theoretical in their emphases") are unlikely to seem original or illuminating, even to the non-fan of science fiction. The non-fan won't be offended, as the true believer may be—but he won't scurry to his local public library to find the books with the rocket-and-atom sticker on the spine either, at least not on the basis of Scholes' theories.

It is thus with happy anticipation that the reader awaits the last two lectures, which "are more specific and practical." In his third lecture, Scholes "presents a perspective on the varieties of modern SF, through a discussion of certain borderline or extreme cases." Specifically, Scholes mentions five writers of science fiction in his third lecture: Theodore Sturgeon, Daniel Keyes, Olaf Stapledon, Frank Herbert, and John Brunner.

Scholes' choices are fine; the five certainly form a reasonable sampling of above-average writers of science fiction—though the borderlines or extremities with which they are associated is left unclear. Scholes is at his best when he comments directly upon the writers in question; in particular, an analysis of a brief passage from a Sturgeon short story is perceptive. But even in this lecture Scholes fails to come to grips with the texts he chooses. Aside from the comment on the Sturgeon passage, the reader is given plot summary and commentary on why the plot is relevant.

The fact is that Scholes is extremely diffident in writing about science fiction; it's almost as if he's afraid that his friends won't really take him seriously on the subject. ("Come on, Bob! *Science* fiction?") He keeps apologizing for his subject. "Rarely has a genre existed about which so many people have firm opinions without any direct experience of its major texts." "Our old formalistic methodology seldom works well as a critical approach to SF." "Much SF is written in journeyman's prose, serviceable but inelegant. Can important ideas be conveyed in such prose? It is an interesting question." It is also an unanswered question in *Structural Fabulation*.

At Scholes' ear is the voice of Eliot Rosewater. "Eliot admitted later on that science-fiction writers couldn't write for sour apples, but he declared that it didn't matter. He said they were poets just the same, since they were more sensitive to important changes than anybody who was writing well. 'The hell with the talented sparrowfarts who write delicately of one small piece of one mere lifetime, when the issues are galaxies, eons, and trillions of souls yet to be born' " (Vonnegut again, in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*). Scholes can't bring himself to scream "Damn the sparrowfarts!" He tries, though: "SF *is* less concerned with individual psychology than some earlier forms of fiction have been. . . . The representation of unique individuality is not so much an end in itself in SF as it has been in some realistic novels. Plot is much more likely to be an end in itself for the SF writer, and when this happens we get space opera rather than structural fabulation."

And there you have it. Some science fiction is space opera, and that's bad; some science fiction is structural fabulation, and that's good. (But if you get too pushy at any point in distinguishing between SF—SciFic—and SF—StrucFab—then you probably *are* a sparrowfart; Scholes, at least, won't give you a lot of help.)

Even when he's at his best, Scholes' defensiveness about his subject comes through. In the middle of his excellent analysis of the Sturgeon passage, he inserts: "This is all very well, you may say, but is it science fiction? I am not sure. But I know that Theodore Sturgeon is a fine contemporary writer who has never been taken

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seriously because he is *considered* to be a science fiction writer. And I know that in this particular passage he is clearly, vividly, a structural fabulator."

The same defensiveness affects the tone of Scholes' last lecture, which concerns itself with a single science fiction writer, Ursula Le Guin. The defensiveness is not as obtrusive as in many of its earlier manifestations, but it still shows itself in two ways. First, there is, as in Sturgeon's case, a gesture at apologizing for Le Guin's being included in "the SF ghetto": "For Ursula Le Guin, as for others, this protection, and the sense of a responsive, relatively uncritical audience that goes with it, may have been helpful during her early development as a writer." (I would again note that Scholes really seems to know little about the science fiction audience; the prominent reviewers I noted above suffer neither fools nor bad work gladly. To that list of names, Ursula Le Guin's is a worthy addition, for she, too, has produced sound criticism.) The other manifestation of Scholes' defensiveness lies in his "cutesifying" of Le Guin as "The Good Witch of the West" and his attesting to her formidability as it was conveyed to him in a photograph. The fact is that Le Guin is a woman of enormous reputation in science fiction circles, and Scholes—despite his clear respect for her work—seems at times to condescend to her. ("Despite having come from the movie ghetto, Garbo has found favor with several *real* critics.")

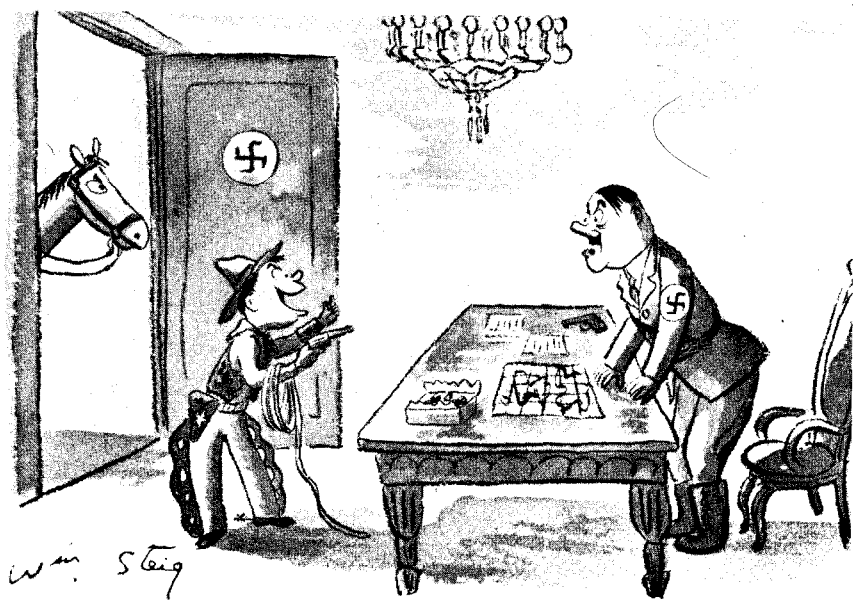
But when Scholes considers Le Guin's work itself, the condescension disappears. His discussion of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is excellent, and demonstrates two things. First, it shows how a truly fine work of science fiction can stand up under and benefit from the methodologies Scholes says he fears must be discarded when dealing with science fiction. Secondly, it demonstrates the superfluity of much of the earlier abstract discussions. With such a fine text, and such a fine treatment of a text before him, no reader needs to be persuaded by the shopworn arguments of the earlier sections that some works of SF are worthy of our closest and most critical attention.

One is left wondering why anyone who can deal with a text as well as Scholes can would waste so much space on unconvincing argument. I think I know. It is clear that Scholes believes what he is saying with a religious fervor. The fervor comes through particularly strongly at the end of the third lecture:

> If we are to . . . act in accordance with a structural perception of the universe, we shall have to depend on the lonely voices of imaginative human beings to bring home to us the implications of our actions. To live well in the present, to live decently and humanely, *we must see into the future*. And if the people as a whole are to accept the present sacrifices required to enable a bearable future to exist, then they must be made aware of the living reality of the unbearable futures that we must avoid. . . .
>
> I am not very hopeful about our ability to rise above present selfishness and direct our culture toward a decent human future. But if there is any hope at all, it will depend on the ability of our men and women of imagination to make us see and feel the reality of our situation and the consequences of our present actions. Truly, where there is no vision, the people perish.

The voice is not that of a literary critic, but rather that of a declarer of dogma, a prophet, an apostle. Perhaps the accomplishment of one who speaks as an apostle should not be weighed against the scruples and ounces of the literary judge. Scholes obviously hopes to convince his literarily-astute audience that structural fabulation is the way to salvation, and, just as obviously, he depends on his own reputation and charisma to spread the word. Maybe it will work; probably it won't.

—*Thomas Remington*



DREAMS OF GLORY

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ODDMENTS

The New Yorker Album of Drawings 1925-1975. Viking. $15.

For those circles whose intimacy with *The New Yorker's* cartoons allows them to converse in captions: a reference work of some importance. From John Held Jr. to George Booth, the album supplies a healthy cross-section of the visual humor of 50 years; there is never enough Thurber, of course, or enough of Saul Steinberg, but one can't have everything, and it's reassuring to know that Peter Arno's "Well, back to the old drawing board!", Charles Addams' "Oh, it's *you*! For a moment you gave me quite a start," and the Charles E. Martin movie-goer shushing his neighbors during a Donald Duck film will always be with us. This is one of those few enormous coffee table gift books that will actually get used.

The International Metric System and How it Works, By Robert A. Hopkins. Polymetric Services. $12.95

A change of pace. On page 221 one encounters Miss Poly Metric (92-61-90) in a white bikini; the rest of the volume—which may very well be a useful source as the U.S. begins to measure up to the civilized world—consists chiefly of tables and vocabulary lists. While nothing is omitted, the commentary doesn't do much to clarify matters and the reader tends to bog down in a welter of comparisons.

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Time, by Al Lee. Ecco. $2.95 (paper).

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

A fine, funny and finally unfrivolous book both public and personal in its well-tuned, individualistic voice. Lee is a craftsman of fantasy, takes life seriously by cutting in with the scalpel at the funny bone—and then goes in to the heart.

The Energy of Slaves, by Leonard Cohen. Viking. $5.95 (cloth), $1.95 (paper).

☆ ½

An uneven collection of what New York still insists on calling "poems"; they're really versified song lyrics. Cohen is one of the best of the songsters, yet this collection will not advance his singing career, and a number of the lyrics seem kissing cousins to Rod McKuen's "poems."

Settling Down, by Ira Sadoff. Houghton Mifflin. $5.95 (cloth); $3.95 (paper).

☆ ☆ ½

These well-articulated poems of controlled hallucination create a lunar reality no matter what their time of day. The voice is so even, the facial expressions so straight-faced, finally, that the poems here blur into one another and the terror pales and dims.

Ordinary Things, by Jean Valentine. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95 (hardbound), $3.95 (paper).

☆

A pastiche of translations, "afters", poems on objects, in sequences, in letter form, and on films, photographs and videotapes: just about every pretense for poetry is present here except the need to communicate experience in a language which means something to the writer and tries to mean something to the reader.

Looking for Holes in the Ceiling, by Stephen Dunn. Massachusetts. $7.00.

☆ ☆ ☆

A sensitive and relaxed and gentle book where the voice of imagination is amplified, not contracted, by a warm and ironical awareness of human limitations. Sometimes the poems seem too merely improvisional in spinning themselves from whimsical premises.

Lost Wealth, by Bruce H. Guernsey. Basilisk. $2.50.

½

The book is aptly titled since wherever Guernsey stakes his claim he pans sand, not even potting soil. Most of the poems are professed epiphanies of the "aware" modern man, but they are actually more like those brilliant flashes of insight most of us experience as we polish the car or put up the storm windows.

Making It Simple, by David McElroy. Ecco. $6.95.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Another volume in the American Poetry Series, which is beginning to look like one of the best outlets in our country for new talent. These poems project a voice intense and nonchalent in its relationships with landscape and people, each line almost kinetic in sheer energy. The self in nature is not submerged here, but it's not worn on the sleeve like a Sierra Club badge either. McElroy is a poet to read and re-read.

Mean Rufus Throw Down, by David Jeddie Smith. Basilisk. $1.95.

☆ ☆ ½

Though some of the poems here begin with subjects as occasional as Guernsey's, Smith is a young poet of unusual energy and variety who transforms them into rituals of self-awareness. Taken as a whole, there is a Dickey-like frenzy in this book—as if the poet had bought his pep-up pills from a bad angel.

Somewhere is Such a Kingdom: Poems 1952-1971, by Geoffrey Hill. Houghton Mifflin. $6.95 cloth; $3.95 paper.

☆ ½

Carefully wrought, "intelligent" poems which would be good for classroom use if one were still a devoté of the New Criticism. If you think rhetoric is moribund in poetry, check this book out and see how deadly it can be.

In The Glass of Water, by David Jaffin. Abelard-Schuman. £2.50.

☆ ☆

Clearly perceived and delicately spun poems which seem to have rarefied themselves until they hold up only a small mirror to the outside world. Much of the time it is difficult to conclude if Jaffin is at ease — or merely o-so-weary — with it all.

The Gift to be Simple: A Garland for Ann Lee, by Robert Peters. Norton. $6.95 cloth; $2.50 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆ ½

Though not as richly complex in conception or execution as *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* (to which it will be com-

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pared), this sequence is a fascinating poetic reconstruction of the Mother Founder of the Quakers. The range of strategies in these poems is considerable; they bring us directly into Ann Lee's own experience. Who said we can't still have poems about characters other than a sensitive "I" and his painful life in the twentieth century?

The Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg, edited by Gordon Bottomly and Denys Harding. Schocken Books. $7.50.

☆

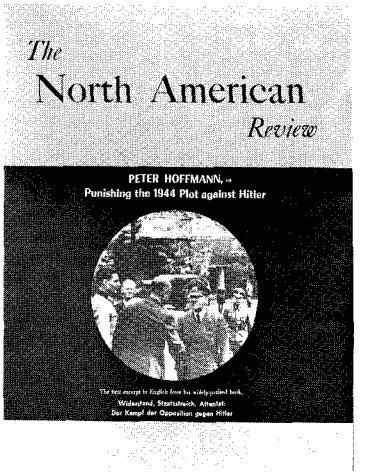
Critical interest in this poet, spawned by several recent books of scholarship, has never been greater: certainly it never will be so great again. If you recall all those aspects of Wilfred Own and Rupert Brooke you thought were maudlin even in high school, you have a handle on Rosenberg, one of those "lost poets" who might better stay that way.

Anthologies

My Music Bent, edited by James L. Weil. Elizabeth Press. Boards $20. An anthology of poems about poetry writing which is more than just another slim addition to the poet's orange crate. This is a beautifully printed and laid out, if exorbitantly priced, little book whose poems are amusing, unpretentious, clear and human enough to interest any reader even if she/he generally prefers *Playgirl/Oui*. Robert Creeley, William Stafford, John Judson, Felix Pollak, Theodore Enslin, George Oppen and J. D. Whitney are among the poets represented. . . . *The Immanentist Anthology: Art of the Superconscious*. The Smith. $2.50 (paper). Exciting as a new movement might seem in an era where every poet pretends, like every college freshman, to be an "individual," this movement's collection is unlikely to excite more than its participants. Duane Locke's essay on the movement is included, a kind of *bouillabaisse* of critical theory, which is the most fascinating part of a book where the poets' use of "superconscious" sounds to us like twice-warmed over Imagism. Don't go looking for a young Ezra Pound in this movement, however. □

ONCE FINE, ALWAYS FINE:

The fiction, poems, and articles of *The North American Review* don't wear out with the passage of time; if there are issues you've missed during the past six years, most of them are still available for $1.50 each, and we'll pay the postage in exchange for the courtesy of your prepayment. On the form below, circle the issues you want and enclose your check; some are in short supply, so perhaps you ought not to dawdle.



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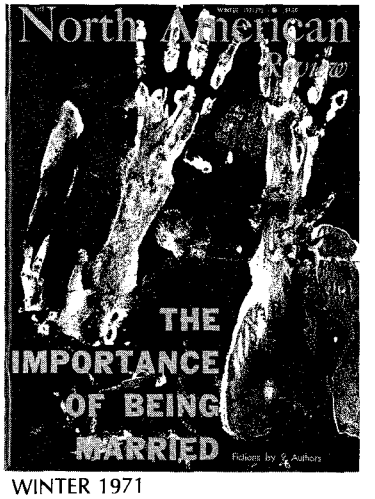

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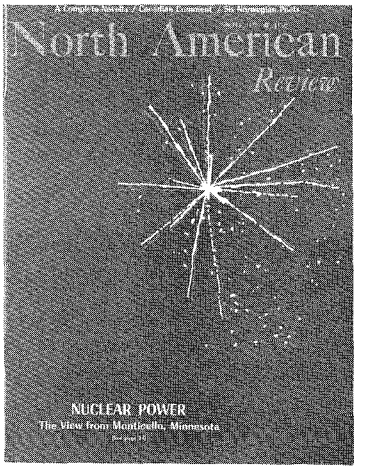

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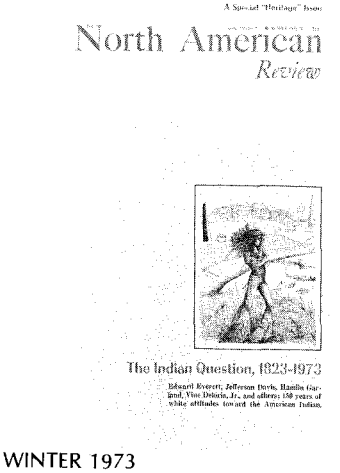

WINTER 1973

The North American Review
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613

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Lawrence Sturhahn

Monuments

Standing in the living room of a house on Broadway (in San Francisco, not New York) I am penetrated by a strong jolt—a *déjà vu*. Because on the wall the bookcases that reach the ceiling contain the 100 books; burnished aluminum hi-fi control panels with switches, knobs and meters; on a shelf flooded with indirect light a tiny exact intricate replica of a train; another shelf with five (or was it six?) Oscars in glittering gold. The man who won them for three years I had not seen.

"How are you, Francis?" I asked.

"Pretty good," he answered.

Francis Ford Coppola called me first, in New York City, my name he had from somebody in L.A.; he would like to meet with me at the Sherry-Netherland where he was staying. The dim room in the cold winter morning in 1966. I remember that it seemed cluttered with furniture, the bed unmade, and someplace there too was Talia, his sister, a shadowy pretty girl who, he said, wanted to be an actress. Over coffee, bearded prophetic dark charming, the young man who was in his twenties told me that he had scammed a picture *(Dementia 13)* while working for Roger Corman in Europe, that now he had a deal with Warner's to do "You're a Big Boy Now!", his own script, and he wanted me to work on it because he heard I was good. We talked of his philosophy about making movies, that this picture had a tight budget and was going to shoot on roller skates in the stacks of the NYC Public Library, and—liking what I heard—I said I would like to do the picture. As I was leaving, the memory: a cold oblique sun had just begun to penetrate the window, throw bright panels of pale light on the floor. Talia had disappeared.

That I was First Assistant Director on the picture, and that the picture is a first necessary step into an intromission of some analysis of Coppola's work; that he grouped a quite fantastic company of actors (Karen Black among them) to play the roles in this masked personal film, (Are not his personal films—"Rain People", "Big Boy", "The Conversation"—denser in theme than the blockbuster *Godfathers*—the history of Italian immigration into this country?), an energetic young man, wrestling with a vision of his story and how that vision was suddenly the reality of pictures on a screen, and also wrestling with the chaotic order of a full-size movie production—the crew, unions, city bureaucracy, egos; all that is important, but less important now than the scene that wasn't in the picture and took place on Grove Street in the Village where Francis had, for his stay in New York, rented a duplex or a triplex and had his wife, Eleanor, and his two boys, and a Mexican woman who spoke no English to take care of them. It was there, sometime during the schedule of shooting, in the living room he had a party.

* * *

A warm night the following summer, the room on the 1st floor that reeked of sublet opulence (—in those days 400 or 450 a month?), and was big enough for a grand piano and, that sweaty night, all the people associating with that instant easy intimacy that forms in the crew on the shooting of a movie and flies away immediately after the wrap party. Drinking what we wanted, eating our fill; Francis, a hearty ravenous man himself, always set a hearty table.

In New York in 1967, the plans for a house he was going to build on a hillside in Los Angeles (levels, I remember, and cantilevers, swimming pool—*everything!)* he unfolds on top of the piano. One sheet folded back, crackling, against the next as he described it. And in that house was this room with the dynamite hi-fi, six gold Oscars, the 100 Great Books, and the perfect toy railroad train. Only the room was in San Francisco. What I had seen eight years before was now here in 1975. Here—where I had come to see a preview of Miloš Forman's film, "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest".

2.

On Sunday night there was another screening at my house. Against the big front window in the front room, its dimensions just less than 6x5, through which during the day is given view of the brooding mountain that rises over this town; at night a screen hung in that window is just big enough for the throw of the lens of a Bell &Howell Filmosound projector set up on the table in the back room, the light beaming through the open doors.

Two screening rooms. In Francis Ford Coppola's basement, plush soft chairs almost big enough for two, with arms and the small shiny table next to you for crystal ashtray or glass of wine. And not much more than 20 feet in front of you, the whole wall, *the screen*, chairs on slightly graduated tiers, in the center of the front row a console with controls that make the picture on the screen turn every way but loose. And blessed silence as the movie unspools.

The click-clack of the film chattering through the gate is part of the sound track at my screening, the sheet hung in the window is wrinkled so other shadows overlay the images on it, and the print is old, scratched and so many generations away from even the internegative that—paradoxically—although the contrast from black to white has built up, the overall tone is bleached out. An ex-student, working a scut job at a local 16mm distributor, had scammed a print of "Loves of a Blonde", Miloš Forman's early feature picture (nominated as the Best Foreign Language Film for Academy Awards in 1966); the invited audience two ladies, another ex-student besides the one who brought the film. Grainy, documentary, faded, the quality of the image suited both the place and the film's theme.

Lawrence Sturhahn lives in California, and is into his second year as the NAR's film commentator.

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A sequence of events that involve one character and the next, that is the story—there is no real story. The sequence is faint enough to be ineffable. What is fixed in the consciousness is a series of faces photographed gently (and contradicting the documentary tone which, I suspect, is only a function of the age, wear and tear of the print), for I can't believe that Forman did not as carefully compose and seek the image he wanted. It is that sort of man who directed "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Next".

Thinking about it, I recognize that it's the *mise en scene* that is finally responsible *(of course!)*. It is the places in which encounters occur—the woods, a dance hall, a dormitory room, a poor apartment, the streets (and gray cold winter)—these very real places which form the moral fabric and texture within which the characters move, which *move* the characters—existent in the preconscious of each.

The picture closes where it begins, in the factory, and with a gentle self-protective absolutely humanistic lie: Oh—the blonde said, I will be visiting his parents and talking about so many things . . . they were so nice to me on this visit.

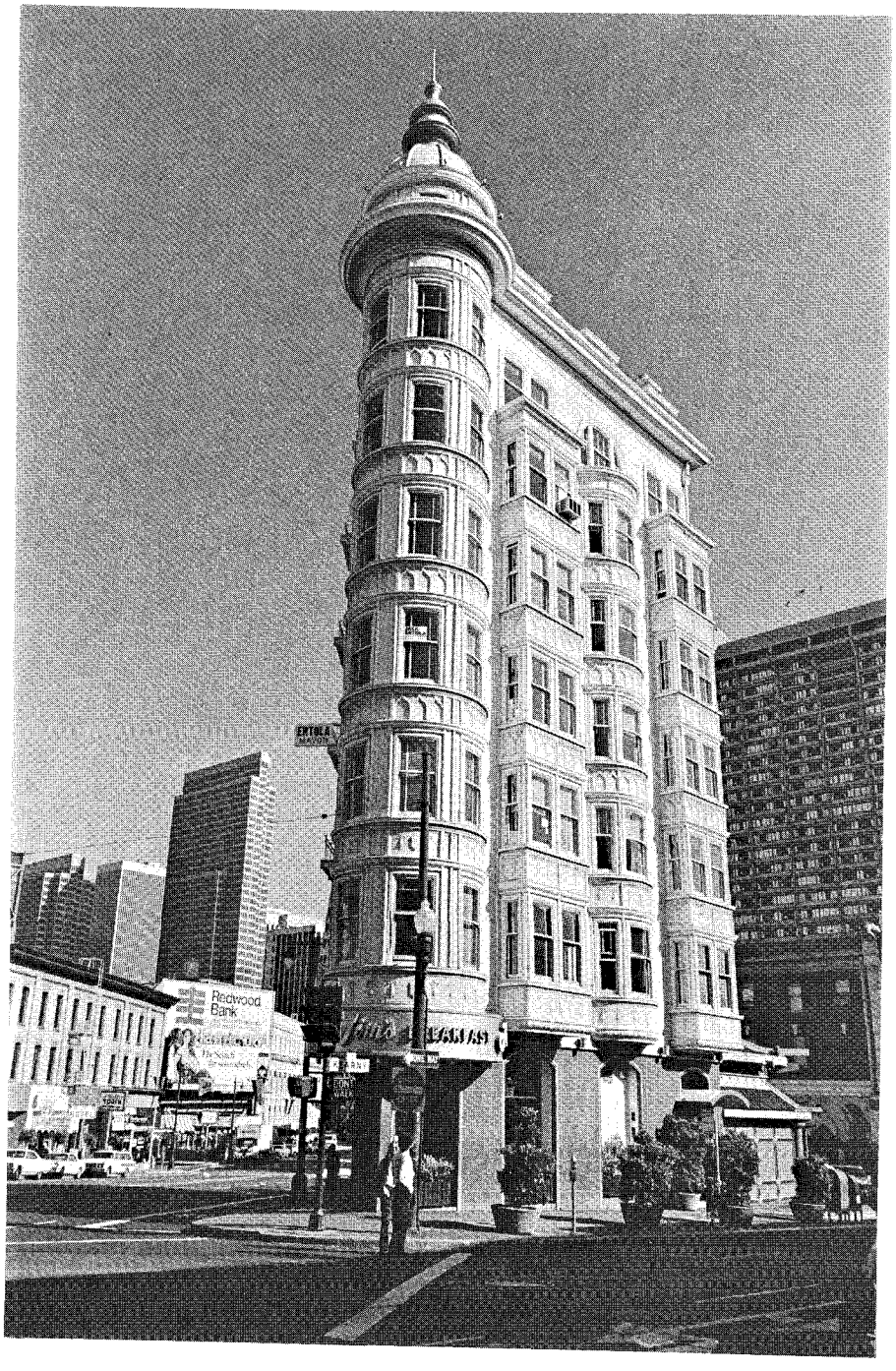
What is as special about Forman's characters—as it is for his images—is their position between good and evil, at once one and then the other, and sometimes both. Obviously her loves love her, but they are also capable of being the cause of pain; they can be like us in lying, for that is the imperfection and limitation of being human.

A quality, evoked in face shots with infinite detail, and conveying with infinite miniscule changes of expression—an eye move, or a lip, or the lines of the cheek shift and the mouth sets. And these subtle shifts are reinforced by the closeups of the hands, of objects like rings rolling across the floor; people naive and salacious and selfish and generous are engaged in living, which is sometimes—often in Forman's view—a comedy of human ineptitude and charm. Yet the man presents optimism; Chief Bromden runs away! Finally, then, the place of the story and the story taking place are in the blonde's head and the viewer's head; the objective camera becomes subjective by what it sees.

Part of Forman's art is being *gentle with his characters*—as Penelope Gilliatt wrote of "Taking Off "—so that others can see. Lying to her friends at the end of her loves, the blonde is but holding on to an illusion which is what she wants—rather than what she has. And if the illusion is strong enough, then who is to define (but herself) what reality she will live in? Also, why won't the self-fulfilling prophecy take as strong a hold on the positive side of the balance ledger as it is documented to extract on the negative? The lie fixes the allegory.

Big Nurse Ratched (Louise Fletcher) in her starched uniform, high waves of period hair from which grows her white cap, both marshal and mother of the buggy bin. After the lights came up in Francis Ford Coppola's screening room, the audience, shifting in the soft chairs, looked quickly at each other as they were asked what they thought? A voice from the second row questioned the image of the *Big Nurse*, too set—directed, not where his head was at. It was pointed out by first the co-producer, Michael Douglas *(The Streets of San Francisco)* and Forman, too, that within the allegorical structure (the Asylum equals an only world) the big nurse is god and there is no ombudsman.

With that same clear vision of a gray world in which most actions are a kind of happenstance; in which (as in the characters) evil is there along with good; perhaps it's better to see it as the needle on a VU scale, never at rest and hitting now and then across the red line of overload. Such a world filled with all that is in any world, and the impression of it is personal to each man or woman's vision,



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Forman's ward just is—both sadistic and succulent. Ratched isn't evil; existentially she's doing a job, and for each man that chooses to die because of a prejudice and the injunction outspoken (mothers do not necessarily do well by their sons—particularly their sons!) how many men has she nurtured with her iron will?

The viewer does not have the impression that this mental institution is anything more than a typical one; its reality enhances its metaphor. It is under-budgeted probably, understaffed, often heartless, but at least some breakwater against the seeming increasing surge of malfunction of the human machine. The doctors respect Ratched; they are aware of the *Big Nurse Syndrome;* sometimes doctors are right, and sometimes they aren't. Ratched represents, frigid as it may be, some sense of order in the deranged and frightened sensibilities of the patients, most of whom were self-committed.

Which—finally—is what the picture is about—not the story of Randle Patrick McMurphy though focused on him, but of Chief Bromden (like it's on the periphery that truth lies . . .) who is faced by the human feeling expressed by McMurphy, and forced by the confrontation to redecide to rejoin the *world* of the ward and then to decide to walk through the open door into the so-called real *world*—the outside.

This picture, like "Loves of a Blonde", begins and ends with similar shots; it's like getting closure on the ellipsis. The opening is Oregon in late dusk, soft hills and dark trees—in the distance the lights of a car coming (bringing McMurphy, as it turns out). The close is dawn and into the same land of Oregon the Indian runs—until he's gone. While I watched him I knew that it was possible to make the choice to do it—I had watched the Chief's process and that was the celebration of an idea . . . a monument.

3.

I came to San Francisco to work with American Zoetrope, an agglomerate film company that was very anti-establishment but never counter-culture; with bright prospects it was to do everything—a blank check and *they* (Warner Brothers) weren't even going to see the dailies on the picture, "THX-1138" (George Lucas' first feature), which it ended up doing, and not much else. Finally—is that so bad? And the man who was responsible, the creator who didn't want to run it, has gone on to achieve stunning heights. His living room in San Francisco is the world, and in it is everything.

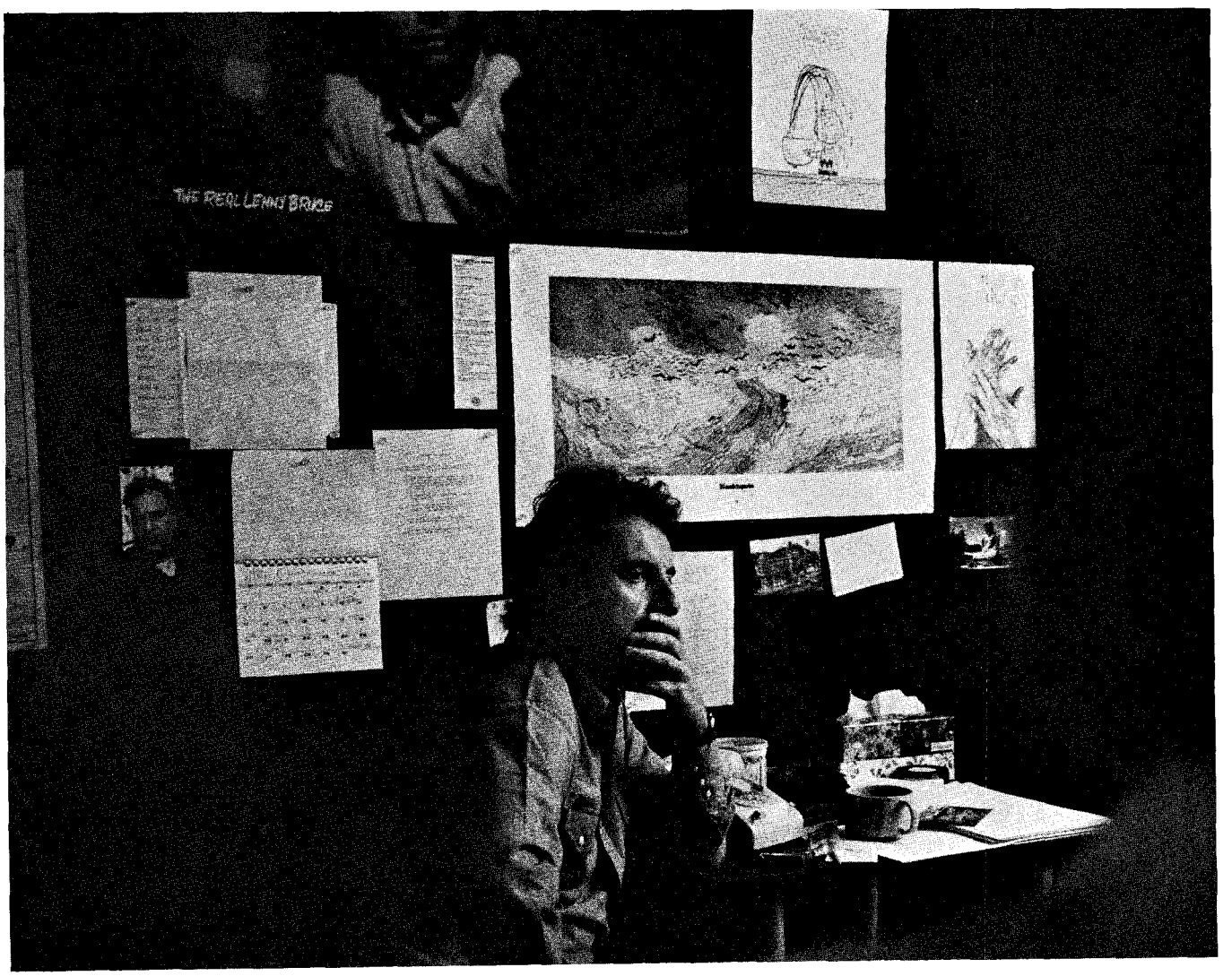
"*How are you, Francis?*" I had asked.

"*Pretty good . . .*" he answered.

* * *

What is real and what is enriching, in Forman's "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest," about the ward in which the action is confined, is the *so* many levels.

One of the great pictures of all time, "*La Grande Illusion,*" is on the surface exactly that kind of picture, a tightly knit plot story about a group of men—gaoler and captives—in a German prison camp in World War I—the time, in the



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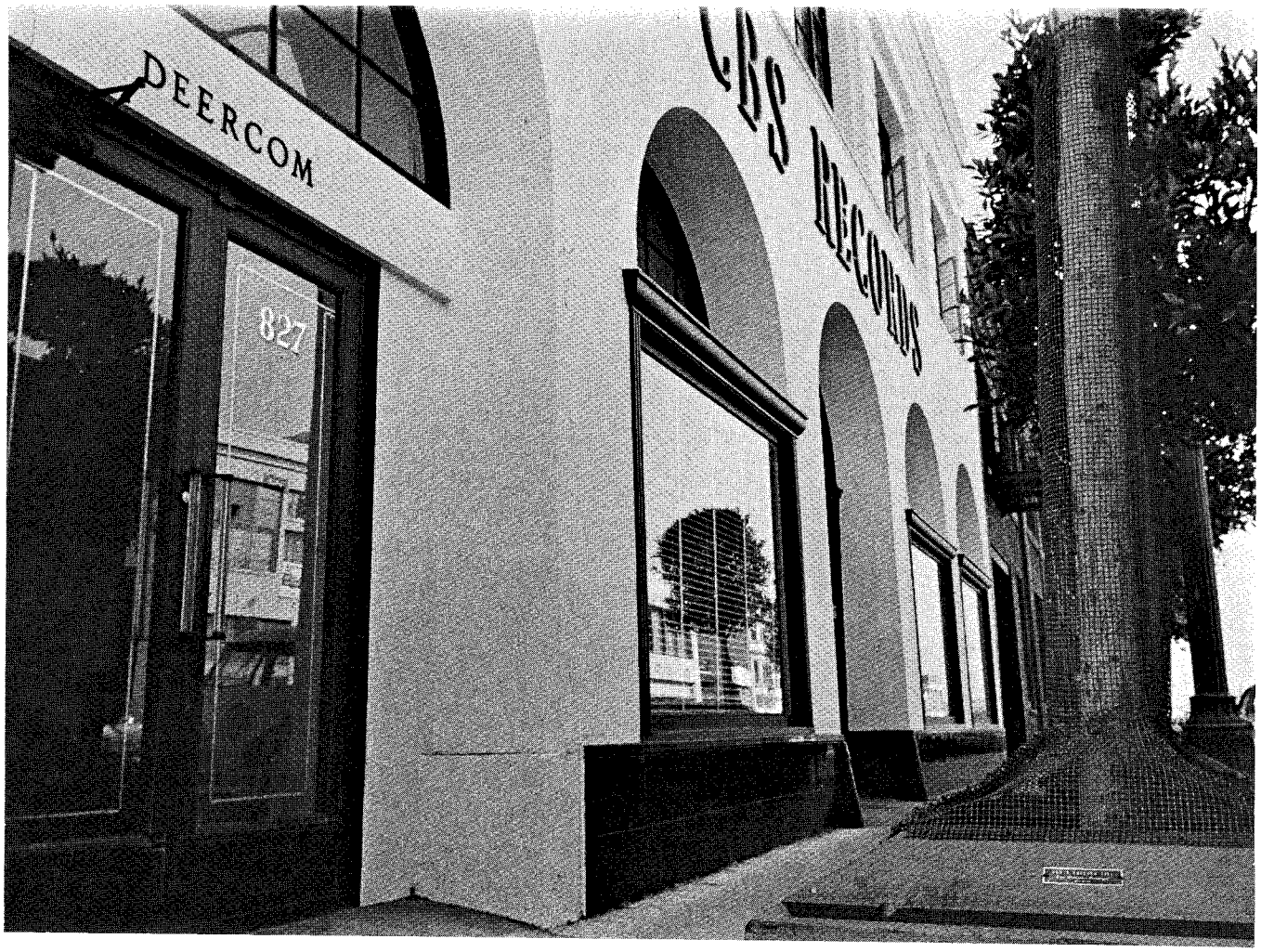

brutality of the trenches, of the true beginning of the modern world. But under that, extruded from the very stones which are so ancient and so impregnable, is another level and another—the story of society and the seeds which were to sprout into the holocaust of World War II. It started two years after Renoir's picture was released, and ended with the catacylsm of the Bomb.

The world changes—such a truism that's become; yet it does, and we better get on the right bus. What was Zoetrope and a dream was in a building on Folsom Street in San Francisco that now has *CBS Records* on it, and is painted white.

* * *

In the academic year of 1968-69, teaching creative writing and a course in film at Wichita State University, there was some money for an all-university film program—such days that are now hard to remember.

I called Francis in Hollywood this time, because I remember his loyalty to the teaching of film. An advocate of the value of the film school, himself at that time a *rara avis* in the business because he was a graduate of a film school; after I wrote a letter asking, he agreed to come.

On the Film Board of the Kansas Cultural Arts Commission—fortuitously happening to be having its yearly exposition in Topeka at the same time—I arranged to have him invited there, and we talked on the long drive, the speed limit on the Kansas Turnpike 80 MPH, from Wichita north. That he was moving from Hollywood to San Francisco where he would open an alternative film company, he told me, and many of the reasons he explained I admired. To make the long story short, and to leave aside matters of some significance, I came to line-produce the first feature the company was to make. That was "THX," and it also turned out to be the last.

* * *

A Zoetrope, one of the first of the illusion machines; it resulted eventually in both the motion picture camera and projector (the obverse sides of one mechanism). A circular drum with slits in it, a prismatic arrangement with the light source (a candle) in its center, when the drum is revolved pictures seen through the slits appear to move. There was one in the reception room on Folsom Street, along with the pool table and the complete and authentic nickel plated *espresso* machine.

That reception room was on the second floor of a pre-earthquake building (the carpenters show me a crack from 1906 in the wall they are stripping) made of red brick at 827 Folsom Street, south of Market.

The movie "THX - 1138" was put together in a city where the life-style is laid back and contrary to the hurry-up of movie making, in a shell of a building where a construction crew of long-haired carpenters were building new what Francis had ordered gutted. . . . And, in the building's center, the source of light, and its church, a screening room equipped with everything to project anything; below it a sound room equipped to record or mix or play back *anything* also—except the goddam intricate German machines always didn't work. On the telephone all day, setting up the picture, all day the hammers pounded; the carpenters were putting up the rock around me.

Space is what it's all about—the spaces in which the blonde loves—from which Chief Bromden runs—the states

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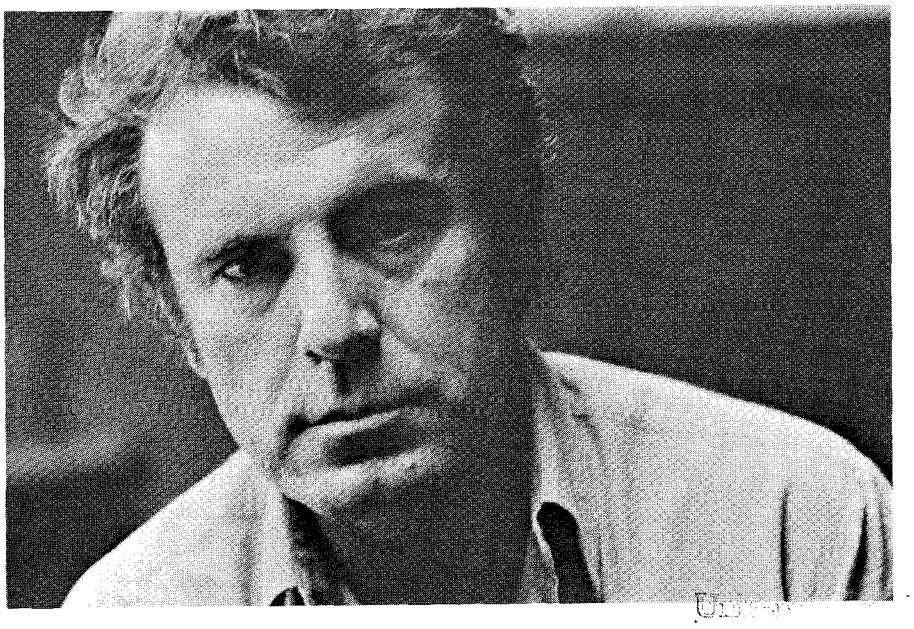

of mind for whole culture sets; Forman's films are never quite as simple as your average epic anthology, a conglomerate of characters in "Earthquake" or "Airport" or "The Towering Inferno", glossy life stories and slick plots which, like the roads to Rome, are finalized in one climactic moment. The Indian attack on the stagecoach used to be enough, now it's more likely to be a staging of the end of the world—or some lesser major apocalypse. After all, you want enough left to make a sequel about: "The Son of *Jaws* Shark—Bruce" or "Captain Quint in the Belly of the Beast." Francis Ford Coppola's next picture is a war movie to end war movies; colored by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to cost 11 million dollars; it's called "Apocalypse Now!" And his headquarters are in Columbus Towers; he also owns a theatre, a radio station, a magazine and a Lear Jet.

But in 1969 in the space at 827 Folsom Street in San Francisco there was a kind of madness that surrounded "THX's" making. And finally, in spite of the fact that it had been accomplished, what was left was a very sour taste.

The least or the most of it—whichever way you want to take it—was that when Warner Brothers saw the first cut they didn't know what the movie was all about, and the cut of "THX" that you see in the theatres now is still the cut that Warner's insisted Lucas make after that. (George Lucas told me that when "American Graffiti" was being talked about with Universal, some people thought it was a movie about feet!) And, no doubt, part of the madness was created by the chaos in the space in which it was brought off. Also it was a producer of the chaos because it chose to inhabit that space. It's no happenstance after all, but as though somebody wrote a careful script; it was something like running into a brick wall with your head. Dedicated to being stubborn, knowing that one or the other—the wall or your head—is going to break, the pain of it happening—*enjoy!*

4.

Recently I have seen two other monumental films: DeSica's "A Brief Vacation," which concerns an ordinary woman whose husband berates her, who has children and a drab and harried life until she's diagnosed as having TB and sent by the government to the mountains to be cured. A far cry she is from Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, but only a whisper, too. What Florinda Bolkan lives is an idyll complete with a beautiful

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young man. Under his hands she flowers and then her fruits grow ripe. At the end, uncompromisingly, she returns to what she left. The thing about any good piece of work is that it doesn't quite finish because it leaves space for a spectator to walk around in, and think about what happened; there are questions left unanswered. Like what the hell is she going to do when she gets back there to the terrible life in the slums of Milan or Naples or Rome?

The other is Pierre Granier Deferre's *"Le Chat"*, with two magnificent and now aged actors, Simone Signoret and Jean Gabin, who represent what I remember over many years, and also play themselves. A little blurred in face and figure they have grown—but oh, the technique!

The film opens with a police car driving through urban redevelopment—ruins as they say parts of the Bronx are like now. It pulls into a treeless street at the end of which is a single square antique house. Half an hour into the film I know what the police were coming for, and so this picture, too, opens and closes in the same place. The whole film, only on the surface the story of a cat, is a flashback and within it are further flashes that in brief and economic vignettes fill in what is necessary for the audience to know. It's about the man and woman who live, fueled by hatred which sometimes masks itself as withdrawal, in this antique once-beautiful home (shown in a flash, at the end of a pretty treed and green *cul de sac* in a neighborhood that is a neighborhood). Now it's barren ground on which wrecking crews obdurately destroy, the grinding tracks of their yellow vehicles crushing the ancient stones to dust—the scream and pound of engines, the swinging arc of the wrecking ball. In the house towards the end everything trembles with shock and aftershock. Pot lids rattle, the pages of books flutter. She coughs and he writes her a note. "You ought to see a doctor" is what is on the paper, then he looks at the glass of liquor on the table beside her chair and tears it up. He writes another *("Le Chat")* and then he gets up to go and find the cat that she has taken out of the house and abandoned.

"Why have you changed?" she asks him. That bland question which implies that *she* hasn't and the faults lie solely in the other, or the other's stars. A riven face, with few shadows left of beauty, she brings to bear on him. And his face is riven too. "I've changed like the whole world changes," is what he answers.

After she kills the cat with an old French Army service revolver, he puts it in the garbage and moves out into a hotel-bordello that is run by his mistress (whom she knows). At home by herself (we have seen in flashbacks a beautiful naked woman—in a circus she's an aerialist who falls and is crippled—the house is filled with posters and pictures of her past), now she's without the focus for her antogonism, the only source of energy she has left (love and hate) and she deteriorates. He calls, but she doesn't answer the phone, and he's hooked into coming back to see. In a seemingly empty house his voice echoes. She's upstairs in the bed she's taken to when she hears him coming. Slowly he climbs the stairs and looks in on her, and like "Cuckoo's Nest" this film is also full of looks, of magnificent blurred faces. That she's manipulated him into coming back he understands. He tells her: "I'll never speak to you again!"

At the climax of the film, when she's dead, he bends over her body and implores her: "Speak to me." At the denouement the nurse in the hospital comments about his death: "The heart went."

* * *

Visual I am, but I am also into words. As a picture creates a hundred images, so a word can have many meanings—the resonance of tone—the look in the eyes—the mouth's set.

Monuments are: ". . . built or placed to commemorate a person or event . . . shown or maintained for historical, aesthetic, or scenic interest . . . a person that exemplifies an outstanding quality or attribute . . . a written tribute to a person . . . especially after his death. . . ." The obsolete usage, according to my dictionary is a *statue*.

These films I've seen recently . . . the thing about monuments is that they last . . . these monuments to our time and our questions. . . .

The story of La Grande Illusion *is absolutely true and was told to me by some of my comrades in the war. . . . I am obviously referring to the war of 1914. In 1914, Hitler had not yet appeared. Nor had the Nazis, who almost succeeded in making people forget that the Germans are also human beings. In 1914, men's spirits had not yet been warped to totalitarian religions and racism. In certain ways, that world war was still a war of formal people, of educated people—I would almost dare say, a gentlemen's war. That does not excuse it. Politeness, even chivalry, does not excuse massacre.* (Jean Renoir) □

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

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B. Paid circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	1169	1784
2. Mail subscriptions	1402	1352
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D. Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means, samples, complimentary, and other free copies	51	54
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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

(signature) **Robley Wilson, Jr., Editor**

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Wild Should Wild Remain.

"Man always kills the thing he loves, and so we the pioneers have killed our wilderness. Some say we had to. Be that as it may, I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in."

ALDO LEOPOLD

"Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man apart from that...."

ROBINSON JEFFERS

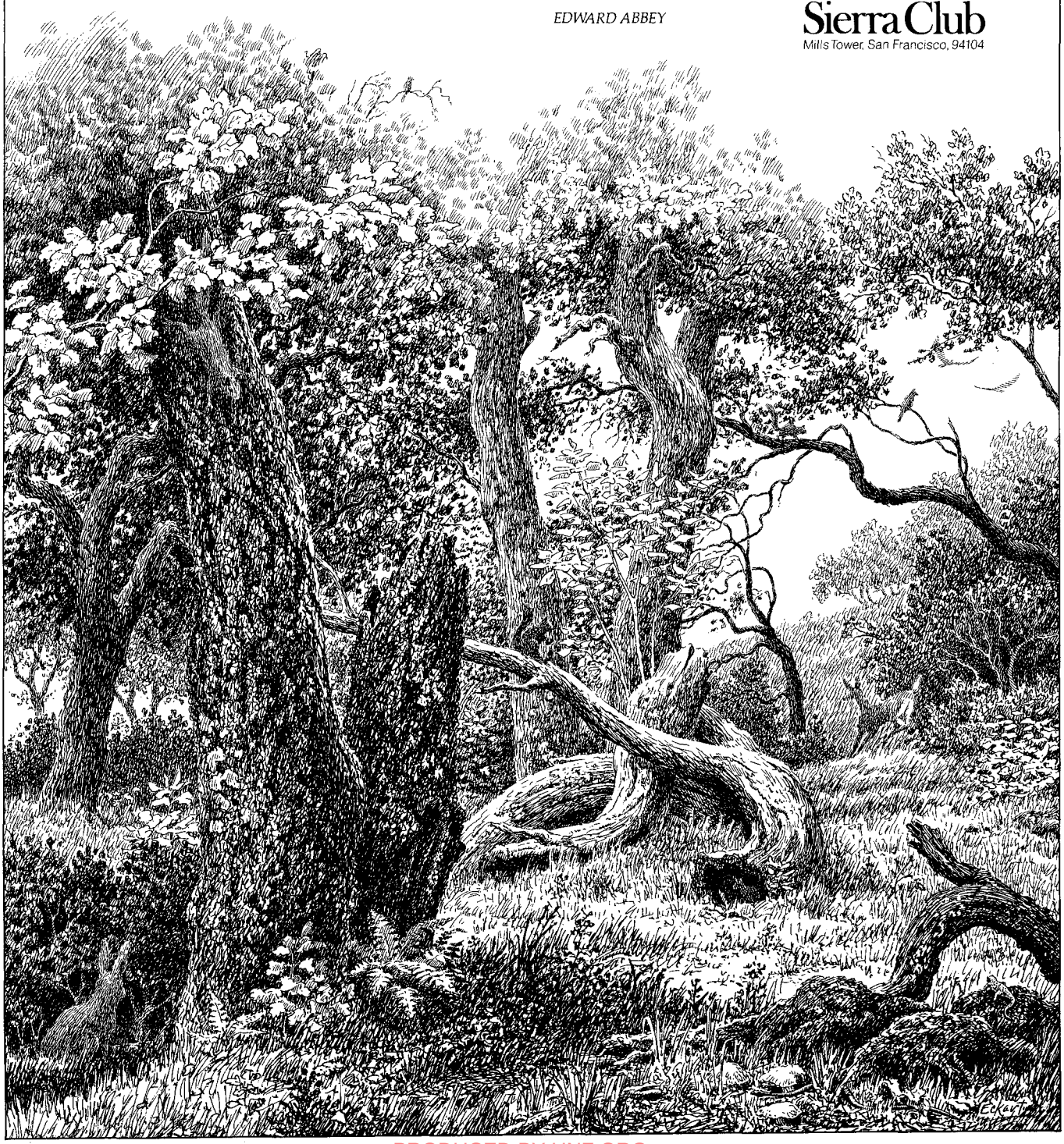
"The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, (the earth which bore us and sustains us), the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need—if only we had the eyes to see."

EDWARD ABBEY

"We need wilderness preserved—as much of it as is still left, and as many kinds... It is important to us... simply because it is there—important, that is, simply as an idea."

WALLACE STEGNER

Sierra Club
Mills Tower, San Francisco, 94104



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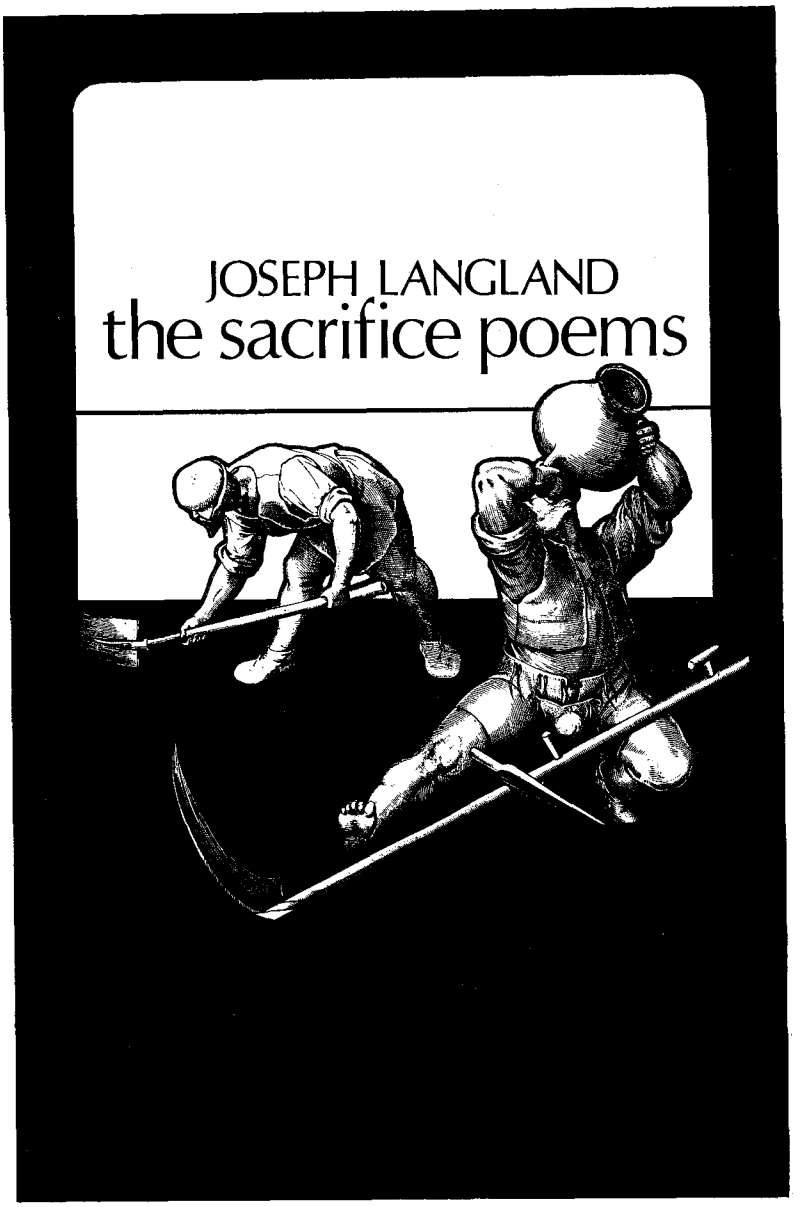

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